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The Christian Faith and the Old Testament

John M. Thomas

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THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

AND THE

OLD TESTAMENT

BY

JOHN M. THOMAS

PRESIDENT OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

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PREFACE

So long as Christianity remains a vital religion, the Old Testament will be a book of living interest and importance. The Scriptures of the Hebrew people permeate too deeply the distinctively Christian writings, and have affected too seriously the fortunes of Christianity and the standards of Christian conduct, for the adherents of the religion of Jesus ever to put them aside as none of their concern. The following pages are an endeavor to set forth some of the more important consequences, both for good and evil, of the inclusion of Hebrew writings in the Christian Bible, and to illustrate a few of the practical consequences of the newer views concerning the Old Testament. No opinion could be more mistaken than that which regards the criticism of the older books of the Bible as an affair of antiquarians and pedants, without influence upon practical life. The truth is that the researches of

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students on these subjects are bound to exert serious influence upon current piety. The author believes that this influence, on the whole, will be found to be for good, and he trusts that his pages will not only increase information on topics of intrinsic interest, but also open the way for the achievement of larger religious good. Attempt is made to show why many readers find it difficult to grasp the message of the Old Testament, and to present the salient facts of the modern understanding of the book, which has opened anew the eyes of many to its beauty and its power.

Students will note the indebtedness of the author to many recent writers, especially to Harnack's "History of Dogma" in Chapter I, and to Wellhausen's "Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte" in Chapter IV. The editors of *The Independent* and *The Homiletic Review* have kindly granted permission to make use of material which has appeared in their columns.

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THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE subject of the following essay is the relation of the faith which came into the world through the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth to the Old Testament, not in its origin, but in its subsequent history. The attempt is made to show how the Galilean faith has been affected by the literature with which from the first it has had an intimate connection; how it has been protected, guarded, and preserved in life by it, and yet on the other hand modified and transformed by its union with that literature, misunderstood, and misapplied through the influence of Hebrew writings, hindered

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in its free course, diminished in its might, because of the handicap thus imposed; and finally how the understanding of the Old Testament, which is open to modern men, sets free the faith of the Nazarene for larger power and even more beneficent work than it has accomplished hitherto. The Bible of the Christian religion consists of the Old and New Testaments; how has the New been influenced by the presence of the Old alongside it? Has it been an advantage or an injury? If partly gain, and in some respects loss, what has been the service? and what the damage? Through the marvellous new light that has been shed in recent days upon the Old Testament, are men in better position to receive only good from it, and to appreciate more worthily the newer revelation and the faith which it enshrines? These are the questions proposed for discussion.

JESUS THE MAN OF FAITH

If one were asked to describe in a single phrase the founder of the Christian religion, one would do well to call him a man of faith.

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His tender, beautiful love is not to be forgotten, nor his loyal devotion to truth and to his friends. His gentle kindness and sympathy, his magnificent courage, his marvellous insight into the things of God and the secrets of the human heart, enter into the might he has won over our lives. But the source of these, and of every quality for which we honor him, was his quiet, unassuming, but unconquerable faith in God as his heavenly Father, his Friend and Helper every step of his way. He loved impartially and to the uttermost because of his faith in the God who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He was a friend to the publicans because he felt deeply in his soul that God pitied them. He looked out upon the fields, and they spoke to him, not of agriculture, although he noticed its processes, nor of beauty merely, though he was not indifferent to the lilies' fairness, but of God, God's loving care for all his creatures. He watched the fisher at his nets, the woman with the household measure, the children in the marketplace, and they were to him but sym-

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bols of his Father's truth. The whole world was eloquent to him of God. The pure and loving Father was to him the first reality of life, more obtrusive in his thought than the hills about his native village. His home was in the spiritual realm. He was quickly done with the things of Cæsar, that again he might render to God the things that are God's. He trod the wretched highway from Jerusalem to Jericho, and gave not a thought to its betterment. He saw the miserable sewage disposal in the valley of Hinnom, but made no plans for its abatement. He was not a social reformer. There is no evidence that the oppression of the Roman angered him in the least. The cruelty of Pilate in his murder of Galileans came into his mind, but he employed the incident to enforce the responsibility of the individual, not to increase national feeling. Judas Maccabæus was a more earnest patriot than Jesus of Nazareth. Patriotism was not his field, nor sanitary engineering, nor road building, nor political or social science, nor any other human interest, however important and excellent,

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save the relation of the soul of a man to the spirit of love that is over all things.

The religion of Jesus was faith, the personal attachment of the heart to God. Among a people burdened with religion as a system of endless laws and regulations, or conceiving it now and then under the summons of some enthusiast as a means of political enfranchisement and material prosperity, he preached a message to the soul of the individual. He gave forth no doctrine as a rule and standard of faith; he enunciated no laws as the binding statutes of a new society. His teaching was vital and inspirational, not dogmatic. His commandments were such only in form; in essence they were principles and truths of the spiritual life. He was neither a lawgiver nor a teacher of laws, but a messenger of life. He taught the religion of the heart. He brought men out into the open, out into the clear, free air of personal responsibility, and the right and duty of a man to make his own laws, and form his own ideals, and live his own life in the fear of God alone. "Why judge ye not of your-

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selves that which is right?" is a neglected text of the Gospels, but surely one of the greatest. Doubtless the Master would hurl it at some of his modern disciples, sometimes, when they appeal to him for dictation on every little matter of conduct and opinion, and lean cowardly on him for all their views of truth and right. In the lonely wilderness he fought with the powers of darkness for his own truth; why should not we follow him there? Jesus would have no man a slave, not even in thought. He sought to make men free, and his religion is a religion of freedom, no system of laws, no system of ceremonies, not even Apostolic ceremonies, coming between the free spirit of man and the God whom alone he worships.

This was the truth of Jesus Christ, and his gift to the world. It was founded on his faith in his Father, the faith which was the mystery of his being. His companions were dull to his truth; the populace did not at all understand it; the learned and influential of his nation scouted it; the Roman would not take the trouble to inquire into it: but he had seen it,

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caught the vision of it a thousand times each day, and built his manhood upon it, — "and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock." [1]

THE OLD TESTAMENT THE FIRST SCRIPTURES OF THE RELIGION OF JESUS

Jesus was a Jew, and was faithful unto death to the religious system of his fathers. Within the circle of Judaism he was remarkably free and bold, criticising the practices and doctrines of the leaders of his nation with great severity, and with his magnificent "I say unto you" practically supplanting many of the teachings which had been received by them of old time; and yet beyond the circle of the Jewish system he was unwilling to go. "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets," he said to the fiery spirits who interpreted him

[1] Many of the parables take on new meaning when studied as revelations of the Master's own personal life, rather than as predictions of the distant future or teaching for the Church.

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as a revolutionary innovator, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." He had a sublime conception of the worth of the truth which God had vouchsafed to him, and not even his gentle meekness prevented him from declaring that a greater than Jonah had been sent to his generation, and that the children of his kingdom excelled in privilege the last and most favored of the prophets; and he saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven when his disciples grasped his message. Yet he said of his Golden Rule, an utterance which declared his very heart, "This is the law and the prophets." He was not consciously founding a new religion; he was interpreting and enforcing the religion of his fathers. To the last he was a pious adherent in his own thought of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thee together!" tells the pathetic endeavor of his life. "Go not into any way of the Gentiles" was his instruction and his practice. He read in the Scriptures of his people a far nobler and more spiritual faith than was taught

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by the scribes, and he gave his life in the interest of that faith, which we call Christianity, but which he called "the law and the prophets."

In the exercise of that sovereign freedom which our Master has bequeathed to us we may declare him more of a revolutionary than he pronounced himself. To us the Golden Rule is not the law and the prophets, but something very much more and better. To us the Sermon on the Mount is not the mere complement and interpretation of the teaching of Moses; it is the charter of a new religion. But this is a truth which came only gradually to light. The first disciples had no inkling of it, for they went piously to the temple and performed scrupulously all their obligations as members of the Jewish commonwealth. In reality they differed from their brother Jews by tenets radically new and by a spirit as novel as it was beautiful, but in their thought their sole divergence was in their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. Our Lord's evangel first proved itself something new by the men it made and the joy it created, and only afterwards

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was it recognized and declared a new religious system.

In Paul the old and the new are strangely blended. The pride of the Jew still lingers in his accents, and his racial consciousness is never lost. He argues as a Pharisee with the Galatian disciples, while he seeks to impress them with a faith utterly diverse from Pharisaism. He declares that old things are passed away, that all things are become new; and yet he reasons of God in terms of the clay and the potter, as if Jesus had never taught the Fatherhood. "We are the true Israel," he says to his fellow-Christians, asserting with all possible vehemence the newness of life through Christ, yet calling it by the name of the narrow faith of his youth. No one can be blind to the fact that Paul was undermining the religious system of his fathers, that he was the most violent and effective of radicals; yet we must credit his assertion that he felt himself the truest conservator of the old.

Christianity did not come to full self-consciousness as a detached organism until after

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the days of Paul. It is only in the Fourth Gospel, in the New Testament, that we read of "the Jews" as a detached, separate, and hostile body. Long before that the Old Testament had become fixed and established as the Bible of the disciples of Jesus. The Master himself had nourished his soul upon the Scriptures of his fathers, and his reverent attitude toward them and practical, vital use of them, taught his friends to treasure them. The earliest preaching of the Church was based upon the Old Testament. Paul is but an example of the entire company of believers in his constant appeal to the law and the prophets. The proof from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ was the first apologetic, and in the meeting-places of the Christians the writings of Moses and David were not less honored nor less faithfully studied than in the synagogues of the strictest Jews.

Thus the Old Testament became a Christian book, and a full century before there was a Christian canon to place beside it the conviction was established that the Hebrew Scriptures

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testified of Jesus Christ.[1] Looking back upon the history, we cannot see how it could have been otherwise. Old things do not pass away and all things become new by the decision of one individual or the resolution of a council. Always men take over their old furniture into their new home. Our religion was the response of men to the stirrings of the spirit of God, and those to whom it was intrusted, being Jewish men, could not do other than take Isaiah and David with them into their new home of faith.

Necessary though this action was, it had important consequences for the new religion, which we are now to examine.

THE ADVANTAGE TO CHRISTIANITY FROM ITS CONNECTION WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT

There was certainly one treasure of priceless value which the early Christians secured in their appropriation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that was the moral law, the Old Testament's clear, emphatic enunciation of the fundamental requirements of right, together with

[1] John 5 39.

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enthusiasm and elevation of spirit in all matters pertaining to morals. To be sure, the Jews at the opening of our era were not all paragons of virtue. The thief and the robber, the extortioner and the woman that had had five husbands, meet us on the pages of the New Testament. The sins of the chosen people in Christ's time were not exclusively the religious vices of the "unco guid," but also the common, dirty sins of the flesh and the evils that fasten invariably to the greed of gain. Nevertheless the Jew had the advantage over the heathen in the possession of the oracles of God, and he was liable at every turn of his evil way to be met by stern rebuke, by the precept of his fathers which he had grossly violated, by a word of intense moral enthusiasm from some old-time prophet, in which the right was made as commanding as it is possible to be in human speech. This storehouse of moral precept, this battery of ethical force, the Christian disciples made their own. They took seriously the idea that they were the true Israel, and they applied to themselves every commandment and every

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summons to holy living which they found in the Old Covenant.

Toward the close of the primitive era Aristides the Apologist made the following defence of his Christian brothers to the Roman emperor. "The Christians," he said, "have received the commandments, which they have engraved on their minds and keep in the hope and expectation of the world to come: wherefore, they do not commit adultery or fornication, they do not bear false witness, they do not deny a deposit, nor covet what is not theirs. They honor father and mother: they do good to their neighbors, and when they are judges they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols made in the form of man: and whatever they do not wish that others should do to them, they do not practise toward others." [1] One recognizes the Golden Rule, but equally clear is the influence in clause after clause of the Old Testament law; and it is not too much to say that the basis of the moral excellence by

[1] Quoted in Dobschütz, "Christian Life in the Primitive Church," p. xxv.

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which Aristides thinks to defend the Christians is the ethical teaching of the Old Testament.

When we remember that despite all its apologies and philosophies and purely religious benefits Christianity has succeeded chiefly, and been of principal use, through the honest men and pure women it has produced, and when we remember also that much of the moral instruction of the New Testament is but the ethics of the Old transferred to the New, we shall admit that we are not likely to overestimate the service of the Hebrew Scriptures to Christianity in this particular.

The new faith had also many a spiritual, purely religious, good from the older teaching. It comforted the troubled and consoled the sorrowing with the words of the God of Israel to his ancient people. It declared the help and guidance of the Almighty in all the affairs of life, his loving kindness and tender mercy toward all who put their trust in him, in the same old-time accents. The music of the Psalter accompanied the gracious words of Jesus in instilling

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courage and hope into the Christians of the days of Nero, and, taught not less by the Twenty-Third Psalm than by the Master's own words, they chiselled in the catacombs the rude figure of the shepherd and the lamb. From the earliest Christian times the pleading lines —

> "Cast me not away from thy presence,
> And take not thy Holy Spirit from me"

have wrought with the petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," and with the parable of the publican smiting his breast in the far corner of the temple, in the production of the humble and contrite Christian heart.

Through the Old Testament the new religion received also a noble and exalted doctrine of God as the Father and Creator of the universe. In lofty eloquence the Christian prophets and teachers proclaimed the monotheism of the Old Testament, the God who appoints the day and the night, at whose command sun, moon, and stars roll on in harmony without the slightest deviation.[1] It was new doctrine to a

[1] "First Epistle of Clement," Ch. 22.

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populace nourished on the classic mythology; and not a little of the elevating influence of early Christianity must in fairness be credited to the monotheistic interpretation of the world, which Christian teachers claimed as their own truth, but which in reality was as old as Amos.

By its adoption of the Hebrew Scriptures the religion of Jesus secured further the inestimable advantage of the union of the sense of age and permanence with the enthusiasm of a new revelation. Any one can feel the mighty seething of the revolutionary spirit as he reads the pages of the New Testament, and catch the pervading consciousness of living in the day of the world's new birth; but scarcely less obtrusive in early Christian life is the feeling of union and co-operation with the world-old processes of the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The men of the early Church grew great with the faith that the whole drama of creation and of history to their time was but the prologue to the movement of which they were the leaders. Their Master was the "lamb slain from before the foundation of the world"; he was the force

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spiritually effective at the time of the exodus from Egypt;[1] he was "before Abraham," and the literal descendants of the patriarch were looked down upon as a modern people by men who regarded their own ancestry as going back to the time when the morning stars sang together for joy. The Greeks were but infants in their sight. Thus the Christians walked the earth with a sense of the nobility of their inheritance, with conviction of its permanence as the oldest established institution of the world; and they united this feeling of stability and grandeur with the passion of a new day of revelation which was burning in their soul.

We may feel that the early Christians pursued the subject of their antiquity with the zeal that is commonly and humanly characteristic of all searchers of pedigree, but it is beyond question that the Old Testament gave them an invaluable sense of continuity with the life of the past. It bound them to God's long process in the making of upright men, and tied them

[1] 1 Cor. 10 4.

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to the realities of the common earth. The latter is a matter of greatest importance. The Old Testament is a plain man's book, and it deals with topics of everyday importance in the common life of this planet. The burdens of the poor and the oppressed are its burden, the cry of the orphan is its cry, and the prayer of the ordinary mortal, who knows his transgression and whose sin is ever before him, is its prayer. What we have called its history consists largely of the stories of fireside and hearth. Its prophecy is but the straight speech of men fused to white heat by moral passion to men who were their neighbors and companions in business and toil. Its philosophy, if such we may call Job and the Proverbs, is the non-technical observation of common men, in the forms and language of the family living room, on the questions which rise up from the simplest life; and the solutions are not philosophical explanations, but simple, sometimes illogical, conclusions of men of tact and good sense.

Revolutions always threaten to destroy themselves, and especially revolutions coupled with

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the flaming of religious zeal. Our old world refuses to be reformed in a minute, and they who undertake the task are usually consumed in the fruitless fire they have kindled. Subsequent generations look back upon their efforts, marvel at the amount of truth they perceived, and wonder how so much of real insight, as later recognized by the world, could have failed of success. This is to forget that enthusiasm can serve only as it yields itself to die, while the truth which lives to bless continued generations must fit itself in humble patience into the life in whose modest rise it will be content.

Few movements the world has seen have run greater peril of dissolution in the wild exuberance of fanatical enthusiasm than the evangel which startled Galilee with the cry, "Repent ye, the kingdom of God is at hand." The ambition of the sons of Zebedee to sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel will be remembered. Nothing is more certain than that after the death of Jesus the disciples watched daily for his return to earth, in splendor and

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great magnificence, and an ensuing dramatic assize of all nations and peoples, together with a new heaven and a new earth, the old creation melting away in fervent heat. Even Paul was not indifferent to such doctrine, was himself caught up into the third heaven, and could reason at times of heights and depths, principalities and powers, the familiar objects of current mystical enthusiasm. It is not to be forgotten that the early Christians placed alongside the parables of Jesus and the moral precepts of Paul the grotesque imaginings of the Apocalypse, with its horses and dragons and weird and terrifying spectacles. In some sections of the Church the white and red horses of the Revelation enjoyed greater vogue than the parable of the prodigal son or Paul's poem on love. We children of the modern world pass over the spectacular and apocalyptic and fix upon the moral and quietly religious; but the tendency of our brothers in the initial centuries was just the reverse.

It was here that the Old Testament rendered stupendous service. It was the Bible of the

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Church, the only infallible rule of faith and practice for Christian lives until at least the middle of the second century; and while it contained the Apocalypse of Daniel, it contained also, and made much more emphatic and prominent, the law of the Tables of Stone, the spiritual and moral ardor of the Psalter, and the stern, intense ethical insistence of Israel's prophets of righteousness. A company of men with such a handbook of rational and honest living could not lose themselves entirely in vapid speculations, and that they did not do so is the lasting honor of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Proof of this statement is written clearly in the fortunes of the Gnostics, who rejected the Old Testament in the supposed interest of Christianity itself, thinking if they could set the religion entirely free from Judaism they would enhance its power and worth. That their schools went to pieces largely because of the immorality that attached to them evidences the steadying and purifying influence which the main body of the Church received from the Hebrew writings.

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The example of Marcion, who was not strictly a Gnostic, but who like them sought to purge Christianity of every Hebrew element, is similarly instructive. One cannot refrain admiration, in many respects, from the arch-heretic of the second century, despite the blackness in which Tertullian draws his portrait. He was a layman, a wealthy ship-owner of Pontus, and at the first was an orthodox Christian, recognized as such by the Church at Rome. Offended at the legal and ceremonial character of current Christianity, and convinced by Paul's letters that the Old Testament was not the gospel, but "weak and beggarly rudiments," he sought to reform the Church on the basis of what he conceived to be Paul's teaching. He held that faith, reliance on the unmerited grace of God revealed in Christ, is the essence of the gospel, and believing that the Old Testament was a stumbling-block in the way of this truth, he threw it overboard, and taught that the God of Jesus was a distinct and different being from the God of Abraham and Moses. Failing to persuade his fellow-Christians of this

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view, he toiled unselfishly and devotedly to build up communities who shared his doctrine, spending time and money freely in the effort; and despite all calumny never till the day of his death despairing of the ambition to win the Church as a whole to what he conceived to be the pure Christian doctrine. To his followers he taught brotherly equality, freedom from all ceremonies, and strict evangelical discipline. Redemption through Christ, and that alone the gospel, was his watchword; and men converted by his teaching were among the noblest martyrs whose blood was the seed of the Church.

Had Christianity been able to take some of the truth of Marcion, and to keep it to the fore, how much of the barrenness of ritualism and the corruption of materialistic dogma would have been spared her! But unfortunately she could not discern the wheat, since the mass of chaff was so great. Marcion gave over monotheism, the highest achievement of the religious spirit before Jesus, and taught two Gods: the Jewish deity, the creator of the world, jealous, stern, and cruel; and the Christian

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God, the Father of Jesus, merciful, kind, and gentle. He threw away the right of Christianity to a place in God's long process in the establishment of His kingdom, and committed the fatal error of dissociating his disciples from the great God who rules the world and holds all things and forces in the hollow of His hand. For him there was no fellowship with the God of creation, with the maker of the stars and the king of kings. His Church was not overthrown by the invective of Tertullian, but by its essential weakness and its religious poverty. A man must meet the Master of all things and forces in the universe in his religion, or his faith is vain.

The overthrow of Marcion is a testimony, sufficient unto all time, that the law and the prophets, from which Jesus drew the nourishment of his soul, are an integral part of the faith that redeems in his name. It is evidence also of the incalculable service to Christianity of the Old Testament, the book of one God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the book of common life and of plain men and women,

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the book of stern commandments unto right, whose reverent acceptance is the beginning of piety.

THE INJURY TO CHRISTIANITY FROM ITS ADOPTION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The faith of Jesus did not secure the Scriptures of the Jews without payment of a price. In appropriating inestimable advantages the Church also received to herself much which has done great harm in the long course of the Christian centuries. It is not honest to recognize the good which the Old Testament has wrought in Christianity's behalf without at the same time confessing in equal candor that the Jewish portion of our Bible has been at many points a stumbling-block to full acceptance of the gospel, an obstacle in the way of its comprehension, and a hindrance to its largest and most beneficent power.

The early Christians made the Old Testament in its entirety a Christian book. They did not select here and there a Christian text, a bit of a Psalm or prophecy, as one is inclined

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to do to-day; but they adopted the entire volume, law, history, and prophecy, as description and enforcement of that which had occurred in Galilee and Jerusalem. They found the life of Jesus, and every truth which their souls had received through Jesus, on each page from Genesis to Malachi. They read in Samuel and Kings, not the record of a preparation for the coming of the Saviour, but the deeds and teachings of the Saviour who had already come. As Paul transformed the humane precept of Deuteronomy, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn," into a prescription for the adequate payment of pastors and teachers in Christian churches, denying that it had any other reference, so every law and institution was made to bear a Christian sense. "*For us* God saith it," [1] they declared, not merely applying to their situation that which had been said to them of old time, but claiming it as primarily and exclusively their own. "These are they which testify of Christ," was their conviction, and while the words before

[1] 1 Cor. 9 10.

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them were of Abraham and Isaac, Samson and Saul, their minds were fixed on the Master who had given his life in holy love.

For example, they read in the book of Zechariah the prophet's vision of the high priest of Israel standing before the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary.[1] The priest was clothed with filthy garments, but the order came, "Take the filthy garments from off him, for behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel." It was an earnest man's encouragement in righteousness to the people of his own time, but the Church fathers made it a declaration exclusively of the humiliation and subsequent glory of Jesus of Nazareth.[2]

"They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God;
They have provoked me to anger with their vanities,"

said an old-time poet of the sins of Israel, but Origen sees in the verse only a prediction of the

[1] Zech. 3 1 ff.
[2] Tertullian, "Against Marcion," III, 7.

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calling of the Gentiles.[1] Similarly the two goats spoken of in the rubric for the day of atonement are made to declare before the time the divine and human natures of Christ.[2]

A few examples give no adequate conception of the completeness in which every verse was made to bear a Christian sense. The fathers found no narrative so simple, no text so tied to particular circumstances, no chapter apparently so far removed from all possible reference to Jesus, that it was not made to refer to some portion of the Christian message. "Christ always spoke in the prophets,"[3] Tertullian declared, and this indeed was the feeling of all. Augustine even said, "God so accounted of the Patriarchs, and at that time made them such heralds of His Son, that not only in what they said, but in what they did, or what happened to them, Christ is sought, Christ is found."[4]

The Old Testament was to them a revelation of past, present, and future.[5] It was their

[1] "Against Celsus," II, 78.
[2] Tertullian, *ibid.*, III, 7.
[3] "Against Marcion," III, 6.
[4] "Sermon on the Temptation of Abraham," sec. 7.
[5] Harnack, "Dogmengeschichte," I, p. 166.

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book of devotion and practical guidance, as well as their arsenal of texts against unbelievers. They found in it what they wished to find, for all conceivable purposes; and every question of doctrine and conduct was determined by appeal to a passage from the prophets, turned to a Christian purpose by allegory. Teachers were highly prized who had the ability to force some new and pertinent application to a case in hand from Moses or Isaiah.

One can but admire the enthusiasm and strength of Christian conviction which enabled these early servants of Jesus to find their truth in the most unlikely places, and to wring from the stubbornest language testimony to the life which was their joy and strength. A new and mighty power had reached into their lives, and they were so transformed and uplifted by it, that the dullest page put into their hands was suffused with the truth and the glory their souls had caught from Jesus Christ.

There were many, however, who could not follow this method of scriptural interpretation. Marcion was one of these, and it was because

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he could not allegorize the Old Testament that he determined to discard it. His followers were numerous, a large company of earnest folk to whom the Hebrew Scriptures, as allegorized by the Church, were a stumbling-block. The Manichæans won St. Augustine, in part at least, by asking him hard questions from the Old Testament. "Is God bounded by a bodily shape, and has He hair and nails? Are they to be esteemed righteous, who had many wives at once, and did kill men, and sacrificed living creatures?" [1] After being stirred to "an incredibly burning desire for an immortality of wisdom" by perusal of Cicero's "Hortensius," the Scriptures appeared to him "unworthy to be compared with the stateliness of Tully," since his "sharp wit could not pierce to the interior thereof," [2] *i.e.* could not discern the figurative sense. Augustine was persuaded later of the truth of the allegorical method of interpretation and was thereby reconciled to Moses and the Prophets; but no man

[1] "Confessions," Bk. III, 12.
[2] *Ibid.*, Bk. III, 7, 9.

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knows how many were not so persuaded, who refused to let their imaginations run wild in the fantasies of allegory, and who were therefore lost to the Church through the Old Testament.

Almost as serious, however, were the consequences to those who adopted the allegorical method of interpretation and were loyal to the Church. Their imaginations were encouraged to all manner of eccentricities, and they corrupted their minds by learning to extract petty pious lessons from the six wings of the seraphim and the frogs that fouled the waters of Egypt. The zeal of the prophets was largely lost upon them, for they were persuaded, in the words of Origen, "that those prophecies which were delivered either concerning Egypt and the Egyptians, or Babylonia and the Babylonians, and Sidon and the Sidonians, are not to be understood as spoken of that Egypt which is situated on the earth, or of the earthly Babylon, Tyre, or Sidon." [1] It matters little to the present purpose how they understood the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; the essential

[1] "De Principiis," IV, 1, 22.

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fact is that the great acts of God in the days of their fathers, and the exalted and heroic truth of mighty men who threw all their soul into the terrible battles of their time, were utterly unnoticed, and the prophets' burning words dissolved into patterns and shadows. They lost Isaiah for the sake of a flimsy argument for the Trinity.

They lost also the ethical force of many commandments and the spiritual impetus from many of the sublimest passages of the New Testament as well as of the Old. Whatever was not found true or useful in its natural sense in either Old or New was effeminated into a spiritual sense. "Salute no man by the way," said Jesus. "There are simple individuals," exclaims Origen, "who think that our Saviour gave this command to his apostles!"[1] The learned father continues that the Master cannot have intended the order to have neither two coats nor shoes, since there are countries of rigorous winter, where such a commandment would be cruel: and likewise he explains away

[1] "De Principiis," IV, 1, 18.

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all force from the precept to turn the left cheek also by the observation that one is naturally struck on the left cheek first, since the other fellow is pretty apt to be right-handed. As to offence through the right eye, he declares it impossible that, when there are two eyes that see, the responsibility for the offence should be transferred to one eye, and that the right one. Thus the dangerous practice of deriving from texts that which may edify, despite their real meaning, which arose from the resolution to make the Old Testament a Christian book, resulted in blindness to large elements of the truth and spirit of Jesus Christ.

It is a pitiable thing when one is trivial in the presence of the sublime. To pass through halls and chambers eloquent of the deeds of mighty dead, and to give one's energy to working out a puzzle in a decoration or in the pattern of a bit of embroidery, is a sad lapse from manhood. It was a tragedy when the early Church forsook the strictly literal interpretation of the records of the heroes of faith, and for the plain, historical picture of their lives and testimonies

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exchanged a puzzle of miraculous prediction and of history before the time. Such a step may have been necessary to the adoption of the Old Testament by the Church; it may have been good defensive tactics at the moment. But in this generation there is no reason why the errors involved in the procedure should not be exposed, and repented of and forsaken by all who have light to see them. To this day minds naturally alert and penetrating are befogged and confused by their endeavors to read the whole New Testament into the Old, and then out of it. Men's reasoning faculties are perverted by the imagination that the grace which God created new and glorious in the soul of Jesus Christ, that the truth which the Nazarene struggled for with demons, and which he drew in from the nestling love of little babes, — that this grace which was vitally achieved by the Son of God can be worked out through the fringes and colors of the curtains, and the silver and gold of the ornaments, of a Hebrew priest's prescription for a shrine.

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For nearly twenty centuries the Church has been trying to make a book mean what it does not mean, and to turn the law which was a schoolmaster to lead to Christ into the very portrait of his glory. The damage from the endeavor has been great. When one considers how much has been wrought in the name of the Nazarene which is utterly foreign to his spirit, — the persecutions, the liturgies, the relics, the images, the philosophies, — who shall say what measure of the responsibility lies at the door of the allegorical method of the interpretation of Scripture which the adoption of the Old Testament introduced into the Christian Church?

If Christian disciples had always made it their practice to turn first to Jesus' own words, and to those passages of the Epistles which reflect his spirit most accurately, and had interpreted remaining Scriptures by the light thus gained, the injury would have been much less than has actually been the case. But the allegorical method made possible the tenet that both Old and New, and all portions of both, were on the

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same level of authority. The result has been that much in the Old which is decidedly on a lower plane than the parables and the Logia of Jesus has been received as Christian teaching, and carried out in life as though it were the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Christianity has suffered ethically all through its history, and receives moral injury to-day, from the inclusion of the Old Testament in its rule of faith. Many the men whose hearts have been won by Christ Jesus, whose sincere desire has been to follow his more perfect way, who have descended to acts unworthy of their faith, not in yielding to the lusts of the flesh, but in loyalty to what they had received from the Old Testament, and the idea that it was God's final teaching. Some of the noblest men God ever made have been less than their best because they made Moses the equal of Christ, and Abraham the equal of Paul.

The most serious blot on the character of Martin Luther, perhaps the largest Christian since Paul, was his consent to the bigamy of Philip, the Landgrave of Hesse. Philip the

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Magnanimous, a man of courage and power, invaluable to the Reformation in matters of State, had contracted in early life a marriage which proved unhappy. After sixteen years of distress, in which, notwithstanding, his wife bore him seven children, he resolved to take to himself another consort. As a measure of defence against popular disapproval he sought from Luther a public statement that his act was justifiable, or, in case that were impossible, a personal letter, as of a father confessor, which might be used in case the storm of popular anger rose too high. Luther had no joy over the matter; the whole affair was distasteful to him. Nevertheless he put his name to the letter, and Melancthon signed it also; and their action to this day furnishes occasion for taunt and sneer. But note the reasoning by which the fatal blunder was made. The patriarchs, said Luther, as indeed Philip reminded him,[1] were bigamists. They took

[1] Rockwell, "Die Doppelehe des Landgrafen Philipp von Hessen," p. 24. Other theologians less honorable than Luther advised Philip to deny his second marriage alto-

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their plural wives, according to the record, with the consent of God. Nowhere in the Bible is there disapproval of their conduct, nor annulment of the apparent precedent that in special cases a man useful to God may have more than one wife. So with his sound heart protesting, but held to the deed by a false view of Old Testament Scripture, he put the name of a Christian prophet to consent to a prince's lust. A man must of course be judged by the standards of his time, and it is doubtless true that the question in the mind both of Philip and Luther was not between bigamy and monogamy, but between bigamy and something very much worse. A second lawful wife in an age when loathsome disease ran like an epidemic among the princes of the Church [1] is comparatively venial. But despite all extenuation, the blot remains, a witness to the moral injury received by a noble soul through a mistaken notion of the authority of the Old Testament.

gether in public, on the ground that Abraham had denied his wife before Pharaoh. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[1] Bloch, "Der Ursprung der Syphilis," p. 168. Quoted by Rockwell, p. 3.

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All that we might wish otherwise in the character of Oliver Cromwell is described and defended, in the Protector's own words, by texts from the Hebrew Scriptures. With the curses of the imprecatory Psalms upon his lips he sought to do his duty as a Christian soldier, and in the name of him who did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets, he pursued his enemies relentlessly, giving no quarter, sparing neither soldier, priest, nor citizen. When the Scottish army of twenty-three thousand was at last defeated, and the "chase and execution" had lasted for eight miles until scarcely a fragment remained, he declared, "This is the Lord's doing: it is marvellous in our eyes." [1] No doubt he was a hero, and served nobly the cause of liberty, but there must be remembered also the massacres of Drogheda and Wexford, and the bigotry of Ireland, and the religious partisanship of England, which to this day feed and fatten on his name. In the guide-books there is scarcely a cathedral or parish church in England in

[1] Prothero, "The Psalms in Human Life," p. 256.

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which Cromwell did not stable his horses and defile the sanctuary, a warning to all saints that if they would not have their piety unjustly celebrated, they must not fashion it too exclusively upon the Old Testament.

It may be questioned whether the iron in the Puritan had a Hebrew source. It would seem that their strength lay rather in their conviction of immutable redemption through Christ their Saviour. But the failings of the Puritan were Jewish limitations imposed upon their consciences by imperfect views of Scripture. The gallows in Salem, for which we still hang our heads in shame, was erected by a text from Exodus — "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

What Christian king going out to war, to settle a matter of right by the murder of men, has not appealed to Gideon's sword of the Lord! What stronger nation crushing a weaker people has not salved its conscience by mention of Joshua and the Canaanites! Black men writhe under the lash in Africa to-day in the name of the curse of Ham! Women of en-

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lightened countries are forbidden respite from anæsthetics in their hour of agony because of the doom of Eve. Parents excuse angry beatings of their children by a text from Solomon.

It is not all advantage which the world and the Christian Church have received from the adoption of the Old Testament as authoritative Scripture, and it remains to inquire whether we are in position to-day, through better understanding of the Hebrew writings and their relation to Christian faith, to avoid the evils which the fathers have suffered, while not forfeiting our hold upon the good.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE FAITH OF TO-DAY

It is impossible longer to regard the thirty-nine books from Genesis to Malachi as a harmonious revelation of religious truth and a uniform law of moral conduct. In no literature which the world possesses is evidence of development and advance more clear and convincing than in the literature of the Hebrews. The Old Testament is a report of progress, a faithful register

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of the upward strivings of an earnest folk from a very crude faith and a very rude ethic to views concerning God and moral obligation which the world still reckons among its chiefest treasures. Both the crude beginnings, the fierce struggles upward, and the exalted attainments are frankly and honestly recorded. They do not follow page after page; some of the noblest conceptions are to be found in the first chapter, as the Bible is at present printed, and many of the latest sections represent the creed and life of narrow and petty days, far inferior to the glories which had preceded them. Yet it is not difficult, with the means at present at command, to unravel the story, and to trace the long, upward journey by which a marvellously patient God led His servants to the best it was in them to conceive concerning the truths of the spirit. It is not correct, therefore, to speak of the Old Testament as if it were a unified system of religious truth, or a consistent collection of moral precepts. All manner of religious notions and all grades of ethical teaching are included in its pages.

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Once the eyes are open to this diversity and unevenness in the perception of truth and right, the power of the Old Testament for evil is undermined. The crimes and blunders committed by appeal to its authority are no longer justifiable to a Christian conscience. Mr. Rowland E. Prothero tells of a British soldier called ironically "Quaker Wallace," of his Majesty's Indian forces, who plunged into the Secundrabagh like one of the Furies, and at every shot from his rifle, and at each thrust of his bayonet, repeated a line: —

> "I'll of salvation take the cup,
> On God's name will I call:
> I'll pay my vows now to the Lord
> Before his people all." [1]

Doubtless one should be grateful that "Quaker Wallace" was supported in his duty, but support in that sort of duty is no longer afforded by Scripture, nor by paraphrase from Scripture, according to intelligent Christian understanding. General sentiment has felt its way to discriminative use of the Bible, and further grad-

[1] "The Psalms in Human Life," p. 364 f.

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ual improvement of the same nature is to be confidently expected.

When the modern view of the Old Testament as a register of progress has its full effect, much in our common morals that is below the best enlightenment, and still more in the prevailing religious conceptions, will find its correction. Criticism bears no sword which can wreak the slightest injury upon any truth which is really true, nor diminish aught the force of any law or precept which finds the conscience of its own might. But criticism is full of destructive power against the opinions of those who would oppress their brothers in the name of God, who would pray selfishly, who would worship or keep the Sabbath for their own mean advantage, or who think to confine the grace of the Almighty in the puny channels of their own creed or sect. Support of evils of which humanity would well be free is removed by critical and historical study of the ancient records, and thus the injuries which have been received hitherto through improper methods of interpretation will be avoided in the future in proportion as

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the modern view of the Old Testament prevails.

On the other hand, whatever of good the fathers have gathered from the law and the prophets is as open to us as it was to them. "Thou shalt not steal" is not less authoritative because Moses did not write it. "The Lord is my shepherd" is not less persuasive of gentle comfort for that David's piety was of a much ruder sort. Both the commandments and the consolations have a force of their own, independent of all questions of authorship and time of composition. Their compelling power is due to the eternal truth and right embodied in them, and as long as men live who need them, they will speak with authority.

But it is not sufficient to say that in certain of its truths and precepts the Old Testament is as useful to-day as it was formerly, for the facts are that the book as a whole is more useful, that the men of to-day are in better position to receive high spiritual benefit from it than the members of any former generation. Through our modern view of the book we may attain

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sympathetic understanding of some of the world's noblest spiritual achievements to a degree impossible to them of old time. Being a register of religious progress, the Old Testament allows us to stand by while the Almighty forges the truth by which humanity has been uplifted. We see the forces He brings on the field, hear their awful crash, and watch some hero as he takes the stand which men will ever look back upon as one of the permanent victories of the spirit. It were one thing to receive a leaf of some heavenly Bible, fluttering from the skies: but it is far grander to watch a man, even to step as a brother at his side, while he works out on this confused and stubborn earth the truth writ into this human Bible, which for its humanity is the more precious word of God. That we may do in Elijah, who selected the name of God for the forward pushing nations of the world; in Amos,[1] who placed righteousness on the throne of the universe, there to abide as long as men think and worship; in Jeremiah, whose accents, whose very visage,

[1] Cf. Chapter IV.

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one discerns in the Nazarene, who after his prototype was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. We have lost the arsenal of texts, each of the caliber of every other, and with it liability to many errors and sins; we have gained a truthful portrait of men in whose lives the Almighty has fought His battles for the highest spiritual truths yet discovered.

In gaining these men we have found also the way to faith in these modern times. Faith is not born of argument and demonstration, but of life, made worthy by faith, that lifts other life to its level. Men produce other men; syllogisms and arguments are powerless to produce them. Hence the great blessing of the newer view of the Hebrew Scriptures, which makes its men so real. Elijah is no longer a Christian who happened to live in the time of Ahab, but the first of the prophets, his creed consisting of one article, "The Lord! He is God!" but that article believed with all his soul; and as we watch him in his fight, and pushing aside the tradition to get at the plain truth, come into contact with the man of him, the faith of his

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fearless manhood takes possession also of us. The Old Testament throughout is a book of mighty men, mighty because of their belief, and the possibility and privilege of sympathetic knowledge of them, their problems and their victories, is full of promise of good for the moral and religious life of the generations yet to be.

The Old Testament is no longer our master. One is our Master, even Christ. The Jewish portion of the Bible no longer holds over us the power to make us less than our best, and to compel us to believe less than our highest truth. The religion of faith and freedom for which Jesus gave his life is no longer hampered by the legalism and the petty ritualistic precepts of Jewish Scriptures. The Galilean liberty of the children of God stands out at last untrammelled of the encumbrances from which for many centuries it could not deliver itself. Prayers that were not perfect, which could not be prayed to the equal Father of all men, are seen to have been unworthy, although they may have served as stepping-stones to the prayer, Our Father. Commandments that

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were cruel, that were based on inadequate knowledge, we cannot revere as the present will of God. The miracles of the Hebrew Scriptures, the stumbling-block of countless generations, take their place as necessary concomitants of every collection of traditions of the old-time world. But new miracles rise from their pages. They are the men, who speak for God in accents yet vital and clear. God was in those men, and the book which enshrines their lives, no longer a weight upon our morals or our piety, is our servant, to teach us how God's truth came to be, and it is the servant also of Jesus Christ, not an obstacle in the way to him, revealing the steps by which we may approach him in whom alone dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

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CHAPTER II

THE DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

AN unconventional brother once enlivened a church prayer-meeting with the truthful observation that if an ordinary Christian found himself in a comfortable Pullman stalled on a Western prairie, with reading facilities limited to a last year's almanac, a Hoboken directory, and a copy of the Bible, he would first exhaust the almanac, next extract all possible interest from the directory, and lastly, if the delay were long enough, turn to the Bible. It is on record that a certain African had persistence enough to read the Scriptures in a jolting chariot on the wretched highway from Jerusalem to Gaza, but from the attention the matter attracted it is evident that such conduct was as unusual in antiquity as manifestation of like zeal would be to-day. The Ethiopian, however, found the book somewhat hard to understand, and in

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that respect his experience is duplicated all too often in our own times. With something like 300,000 sermons on biblical texts preached every week in the churches of the United States, with over a million people teaching Sunday-school classes, with books and pamphlets by the thousand on all phases of Bible study, it remains a fact that only the few have more than the most general knowledge of the Bible, while the great majority even of well-informed people feel that their knowledge of Scripture is sadly deficient. No subject is taught so much and understood so little. If a tithe of the pains which is now expended in endeavors to imbue American youth with a knowledge of Scripture were taken to obsess their minds with the dramas of Shakespeare, ignorance of the trap in which Shylock was caught would be hard to find. Yet who does not know that references to like prominent events in biblical story are met with looks of questioning wonder even on the faces of educated persons?

All interesting and intelligible books are perused to-day with great avidity. If the

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Bible is not read, and if large numbers are ignorant concerning it, the reason must be that it is not found interesting, and it is safe to add that the reason the book does not incite interest is because it is not understood. I received a confession the other day, deponent witnessing about as follows: "I made up my mind I was neglecting the study of the Bible, and I resolved to study it seriously; I happened to open up the book to Jeremiah, and feeling that there was unexplored territory, which might offer something new and agreeable, I began to read; but I was disappointed greatly; I could not see what it was all about, and I soon gave up the effort."

This confession declares the situation of many persons, especially in relation to the Old Testament. They do not read because they are not interested, and they are not interested because they do not understand.

Now why should it be difficult for any person of ordinary intelligence to understand the Old Testament? Certainly not for the same reason that it is hard to follow Kant's "Critique

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of the Pure Reason" or Mr. Balfour's "Foundations of Belief." The Old Testament is not philosophical; its thought is not abstruse, its conceptions are not abstract, its style is not involved. There is not a sentence in Jeremiah which is beyond the grasp of an ordinary mind because of the depth or difficulty of the idea which it contains. If any verse of the book is unintelligible, it is not because what the prophet would say is beyond ordinary comprehension, but because the reader does not comprehend what the prophet is trying to say.

For example, one reads that Jeremiah said: "I see a boiling caldron, and the face thereof is from the north."[1] Every one can picture to himself a seething pot with spout pointing away from the north, and the image is readily called forth by the prophet's language; but what he means by it is not clear, and is not made clear by his explanation, "out of the north shall evil break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land." Why this evil? Why from the north? Why such uncanny imagery? It is

[1] Jeremiah 1[13 f.]

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not very easy even for the studious reader to find an answer. Yet until one enters by sympathy into the life of Jeremiah's day, and feels with him the terrible army of the Babylonians and their resistless march southward toward Jerusalem, it is as idle to think to understand his words as it would be to endeavor to extract meaning from Lincoln's second inaugural if one did not know that America was ever engaged in a civil war.

Doubtless the dedicatory address at Gettysburg, to one as far away from the events of 1861–1865 as the men of to-day are removed from the equally portentous times of Jeremiah, would be as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. But given like knowledge of the Hebrew patriot, and his words will be not less eloquent, not less pathetic, not less inspired, than the words of the modern martyr. Indeed when you know them, there is a strange likeness between these two — lonely men, pathetic men, sensitive men appointed unto marked publicity, tender-hearted men obligated to awful deeds.

The obscurity of Jeremiah, owing to the

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difficulty of arriving at a clear understanding of the situation to which he addressed himself, is a fair example of the obstacles one meets on almost every page of the Old Testament. There are gems of utterance, like the Gettysburg address, but no explanation of the occasion on which they were delivered. There are orations on public policy, whose elevation one cannot mistake, and from whose moral fervor the soul catches fire, yet their full force is missed because sometimes their parts are disconnected, while irrelevant and neutralizing sections are thrown in, and the orderly thought of the whole and the goal the speaker had in mind are not brought into the clear. The mighty men of the Old Testament were prophets, and they were the makers of Israel's religion; but their works have come down to us in such fragmentary manner, with such frequent breaches of chronological sequence, that the ordinary reader is bewildered and confused, and no clear conception of the prophet's work results. The consequence is that the only popular use of the most essential books of the Old Testament is to

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furnish a few texts by which it is thought to establish the fulfilment of prediction, an argument for faith which is weak in itself, and becomes weaker the more one studies it, and which has the disastrous consequence of blinding its devotees to the true historical meaning of the texts which it thus perverts.

If the statement that the prophetical writings are fragmentary, interpolated, and without chronological sequence smacks too much of subjective criticism, the difficulty of deriving from them any idea of the orderly growth of Israel's piety may be substantiated as forcibly from the order in which book follows book. Taking the minor prophets, one goes from Hosea, a teacher in the great days of Jeroboam II of Israel, to Joel, who was one of the last of the prophets, and who quotes from many of them; thence back to Amos, who was the first of all, preceding even Isaiah; thence to Obadiah, who had somewhat to say concerning Edom in the days of the exile; thence to Jonah, who was not a prophet at all, but a literary artist of the first magnitude and a teacher of

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toleration and of the equal Father of all men in the late times of Israel's bigotry; thence to Micah, a younger contemporary of Isaiah: and thus from Isaiah to Malachi the reader is snatched hither and yon, dragged forward and backward over centuries, and confronted with situations the most diverse. It is instructive to note the dates of the several prophets, major and minor, as their books stand in the Bible, taking in each case the earliest probable date of the predominant portion of the prophecy. Beginning with Isaiah, the years before Christ are as follows: 740, 626, 592, 168, 745, 400, 760, 450, 450, 700, 650, 600, 630, 520, 520, 540. It is patent that from a book thus put together it is impossible for the general reader to derive anything like a consistent picture of the relation of mind to mind and of the development of religious truth and practice.

The suggestion is near at hand that, since many of the prophetical writings are equipped with a brief introduction relating them to times of particular kings, one has but to turn to the historical books and secure from thence the

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necessary background for the knowledge of the prophets. It might seem providential that the Old Testament offers both the original documents of its growing truth in the form of prophetic discourses, and also historical summaries of the problems and events of each corresponding period. One has not to proceed far on this theory before discovering that the books of Kings and Chronicles are utterly disappointing if one seeks to gain from them any real knowledge of the situations to which the makers of Israel's faith applied themselves. To be sure, the historians have preserved a large number of important facts, without which our knowledge would be far smaller than it is; but as guide-posts on the way to correct appreciation of the means and the steps by which Israel travelled her long road upward toward her worthiest faith, these books of history are altogether misleading. It is not too much to say that Israel's historians have prevented true understanding of their nation's greatness in the case of countless thousands. With their monotonous comment on the "sin of Jeroboam, the

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son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin," they have estimated each generation for over two hundred years according to its devotion to one particular sanctuary, condemning each king who did not worship at the prescribed altar and according to the proper ritual. Such a history no more gives a faithful account of the real condition of things in Israel than would a similar account of the history of New York City since the days of Peter Stuyvesant, which made chiefly prominent the sort of ritual practised in Trinity Church, and the measure of adherence to it on the part of the various mayors. The hopelessness of deriving a sufficient conception of the character of Israel's kings, the true nature of their piety, and the progress of their people toward nobler life and worthier ideas of God, from a history of this character, must be evident to all.

The Old Testament as it stands to-day is dominated by the priestly notions which prevailed in the time of Israel's decay, two centuries after the ages of its strongest life and its clearest vision of the things of God. In the

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year 458 B.C. Ezra the scribe came from Babylonia to Palestine, and brought with him the law of God. A reformation was enacted in Jerusalem, in accordance with its terms, and from the character of this reformation and the dependence of the law upon Ezekiel, it can be shown that the code for which Ezra the scribe was so zealous had been composed not long before in Babylon. This is the code which shows least the influence of the prophets, which is monotonously tiresome in ritualistic prescriptions, which makes religion a matter of altar measurements and curtain hangings, and which teaches by certain implication that to sacrifice is better than to obey, and that the sacrifices of God are not a broken and a contrite heart, but the blood of bulls and of goats. Leviticus is simply the priestcraft against which Amos and Isaiah hurled invective, transformed into law, and entitled with the name of Moses.

Yet it is precisely this legal and priestly portion of the Old Testament which constitutes its framework, which has fixed its chronology, which has thrust its general scheme of the his-

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tory of the Hebrews and the origin and growth of their religion into general acceptance and belief. The popular notion of the Old Testament is the priestly notion, which Amos would have resisted as strenuously as he opposed Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, and which is as far below the noblest piety of Israel as 2 Peter is below the Gospel of St. John. It is due to the code which Ezra brought from Babylon that we think of Israel in the desert as a great Church on a pilgrimage, with a shrine outrivaling in splendor the tomb of a mediæval saint, and a system of worship more complex and costly than the most elaborate Roman Catholic ritual. It is this priestly document which has supplied Christian defenders of the faith with the hopeless task of finding moral justification for the slaughter of the Canaanites, for only in the later writings are they exterminated; in the earlier accounts Hebrews and Canaanites live on together in the same land many years. After the teaching of the priests of Israel we conceive that sacrifices and offerings were the most important matters God had to convey to His chil-

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dren for well-nigh two thousand years, and we naïvely suppose that this elaborate system of ritual and ceremony, with the entire moral law, sprang into existence almost in a day at the beginning of the national life. Thus it has been impossible to conceive of any development of Old Testament religion, since according to the theory the whole was present at the beginning, and succeeding generations had no need to struggle their way up into the truth, but merely to obey a law which had come down from Heaven.

Herein lies the chief difficulty of understanding the Old Testament. It is not the largeness of the book, nor the remoteness of its life, nor the oriental character of its imagery, nor the obscurity of its ideas. It is unintelligible, and therefore uninteresting, because one cannot follow the development of its thought and its religious conceptions. Its first rude beginnings of belief in God and crude endeavors to do His will are hidden in fragmentary narratives in Judges and Samuel and in portions of the Pentateuch. Its early days of

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strength and its magnificent rise to spiritual religion are covered up in the obscure and difficult orations of the prophets. But in the times of its decay, when the prophet had given way to the priest, the records of its rise were taken in hand by small-minded men who judged all things by the petty ritualistic standards of their time, and thus the priestly stamp was impressed upon the whole.

The way to an understanding of the Old Testament lies through criticism. The Old Testament will ever remain an enigma and a riddle until it is understood as a growth. It will hold men back from their best estate in piety and morals so long as they yield it homage as alike the word of God in every part. The common man must be taught to discern between the diverse sorts of religious documents, which vary in historical trustworthiness, and mislead often as to their origin and their true position in the growth of piety. The criticism which is now the exercise of the schools must become the practice of the private student who turns to the Bible for moral encourage-

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ment and religious illumination. The Church must teach the Old Testament as the critics interpret it, if her more progressive members are to preserve their regard for Scripture. The modern man understands only that in which he can trace cause and effect, and knows history and biography only as progress and development. Without criticism no history of Old Testament faith is possible, and widespread popular interest in the Scriptures, which above others were written for our learning, waits for fearless and earnest presentation, from the pulpit as well as from the lecturer's chair, of the methods and principles by which knowledge of the growth of Israel's faith has been attained. Critical use of the Old Testament alone makes it intelligible, spares one the harm which results from promiscuous adoption of its precepts, and renders possible the benefit which is theirs who work their way close to the creators of the world's highest religious truths.

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CHAPTER III

THE FIVE POINTS OF OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM

DESPITE all that has been said and written concerning the newer knowledge of the Old Testament, it is doubtful whether any large number of intelligent readers of the Bible possess a clear and accurate notion of just how the views urged by modern scholars differ from those which have formerly obtained. It is imagined in some quarters that the sponsors of the newer theories desire to secure relaxation for themselves and others from the strict requirements which the men of old time deduced from the Scriptures, and that the higher criticism is part of a general movement in the direction of moral laxity and religious indifference. It is doubtless true that motives of this sort have had weight with some, but the movement as a whole is too large, is too intimately mingled with the intellectual currents of the time, and

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includes among its followers too many devoted men of earnest godliness, to be attributed to such unworthy impulses. Neither is it true that there has arisen a company of men who desire to pick and choose from the Bible that which is in accord with their fancy and taste, setting the rest aside as unacceptable. No scholar has attempted to draw any line between that which is inspired and that which is uninspired, and certainly no one has any desire to make the Bible any smaller, to remove from it any book or portion of a book, or to alter its text and change its meaning. On the contrary, there is persistent and strenuous effort, especially on the part of advanced students, to secure the purest text and the most accurate interpretation; and the discovery of any additional sources of information, like the Moabite Stone, the Tell-el-Amarna tablets, or the Aramaic papyri of Elephantinê, is hailed with greatest delight. While the idea of the supernatural which prevails among progressive modern students differs from that most widely prevalent in former generations, it cannot fairly be maintained that a new

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attitude toward miracle has brought about the remarkable revision of opinion as to the literature and history of the ancient Hebrews which recent times have witnessed. It is more correct to say that men's ideas of the action of God in the affairs of men have changed through new insight into the Biblical history, than it is to contend that a philosophical opinion of the supernatural has reconstructed the history.

All talk, therefore, about "tearing the Bible to pieces," "cutting it all out but the covers," about "hostile critics," "enemies of the Bible," etc., is beside the mark. We have to do in this matter with a particular application of methods which are prevailing in all historical investigation, with a specific instance of the broadening of knowledge in the entire field of the past, with truer appreciation of how great movements had their rise and great truths came to their might. Given a history of Rome like that of Mommsen, and students could no more help working out a similar history of ancient Israel, than American steel-makers could refuse to

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change the methods of their industry after the discoveries of Sir Henry Bessemer in England. New principles of investigation are bound to flow over from one province into another, and what von Ranke called "going back of the documents" has become so fixed a habit with all investigators of the past that the ancient records of our religion cannot possibly resist their application.

It ought to be possible to summarize in brief compass the results of the application of the principles of historical science to the books of the Old Testament, and to state with clearness the leading facts in which modern students are substantially agreed. John Calvin's doctrine, radical in its time, won speedy vogue, in part at least, because his system could be reduced to the famous "Five Points of Calvinism." An attempt to formulate five points of Old Testament criticism may therefore be worth while. We will take them up in logical order, and attempt a brief consideration of their outlines.

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I. THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Criticism is so generally supposed to be dominated by the spirit of negation and denial that it may come with a bit of surprise to some to have its first point headed "The Trustworthiness of the Historical Books." Yet unless it is clearly perceived that the starting-point of the new construction of Israel's history is the reliability of the records, the real character of the movement will be misunderstood. No one pretends to have any wiser information as to what occurred in the times of Moses and David than is furnished by the Bible itself, and no one imagines that any recent discoveries of monuments or manuscripts can do anything more than supplement the sources of information which have been available to all for centuries. Some students have a way of writing about "our sources" as if private avenues of information were open to the elect; such, however, is not the case, for even the archæological finds are speedily made available for general

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use, and for the most part the newer theories are founded upon passages which are perfectly familiar, but whose real significance has been unobserved.

It is a question of interpretation, of the force and credence one thinks should be given to passages which appear to be mutually contradictory. Every careful reader must realize that the Old Testament is a broadly tolerant book, that it includes varying types of piety and divergent conceptions of the history which it recites. Leviticus is certainly not like the Psalms, nor Joshua like Hosea, nor Isaiah like Haggai. The older view of Hebrew religion is based upon that type of piety which is most prominent in the Old Testament, which is most easily read from the surface; the newer view is founded upon conceptions which do not thrust themselves out so plainly, which are hidden away in the historical books and in obscure references in the prophets. The issue is whether we shall take the latter at their face value and interpret the views more emphatically enunciated as a later understanding of the

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events, or whether we shall accept the construction of the history that lies on the surface of the documents as entirely reliable, and explain the passages which appear to imply another order of events as best we may. The modern view maintains that the references to religious practices in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings are perfectly frank and reliable accounts of the religious customs and beliefs that prevailed in Israel at that time, the best that men knew in those days, and therefore that we must frame our history of the religious development of the Hebrew people accordingly, no matter how radically it may force us to change our views of the date and authorship of many of the ancient documents and institutions.

One reads in the book of Judges of Gideon, the leader of the three hundred who vanquished the hordes of Midianites and made the "day of Midian" proverbial.[1] It is recorded that Gideon made request of his soldiers for the golden ear-rings they had taken in spoil, and that he made an ephod, a molten image, of the

[1] Isaiah 9 4.

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gold, and set it up as an idol in Ophrah, the city of his fathers.[1] There can be no doubt of the loyalty to Israel's God of the man who fought to the cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Not the slightest question is raised as to his piety and good faith in making an image in honor of his victory and for a religious use. Gideon was the first man in Israel in his day, and the conclusion would seem to be inevitable that the piety of the nation as a whole was not at this time on a higher plane than that implied by this ephod before which men worshipped to determine the will of God.

One of the most enlightening narratives of the Old Testament for the determination of early Hebrew religion is the account of the idol of Micah and the migration of the Danites.[2] The story is delightfully simple and naïve, and one cannot refuse the conviction that it reflects in utmost fidelity social and religious conditions in the period following the settlement in Canaan. A party of five Danite soldiers, in

[1] Judges 8 24, 27.
[2] Judges 17 and 18.

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search of a new home for their clan, light upon the abode of a certain Micah, in the hill country of Ephraim. This Micah had a shrine in his house, a graven image and a molten image, sacred to Jehovah, God of Israel, and he had also a Levite as priest. The five wandering Danites seek the benefits of divination at the hand of this priest, and are encouraged in their journey, which, indeed, has a prosperous issue. When they come Micah's way again, this time leading the entire tribe, with six hundred fighting men, to the new home they had prospected, they return evil for hospitality, and carry off with them both Micah's images and his priest, and reply tauntingly as the outraged owner of the idols undertakes to recover his property, "What aileth thee?" — the ancient equivalent of, "What is the matter with you?" The Danites are too strong for Micah, and they set up his idols and establish his priest in their new home in the extreme north of Israel, and thus was founded the city we know from the proverb, "From Dan to Beersheba."

It is clear as day from this story that in those

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days any one who could afford it, and was pious enough, could have a shrine in his house, support his own priest, and make use of images and idols, without the slightest fear of offending the God of Israel. Religion was a private matter, it was governed by custom rather than by law, and it was exceedingly crude in both doctrine and ritual.

One desiring to study thoroughly the religion of the Old Testament could not do better than to take the entire book of Judges, or the books of Samuel, and make a study of the religious beliefs and usages implied in their narratives, not reading into them what is not there, nor supposing that beliefs which are unexpressed are to be taken for granted, but simply formulating the system of religion to which those books alone bear witness. The result would be a very simple and crude form of piety, entirely different from the fully developed religion of Israel. It is the first point of Old Testament criticism that this result is historically correct; that Israel did come into Canaan with very crude notions about God and His command-

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ments, and that the ideas of the nation for a long time continued crude, only after centuries emerging in the high faith of the nobler Psalms and prophecies. Gideon did not lapse from a nobler religion existent in his time when he melted the ear-rings into an ephod; Jephthah did not transgress any known law when he sacrificed his daughter because of his vow to the Lord; Samuel was not doing anything in the least out of the way when he led a village feast with a sacrifice in the high place near his home; Saul was preventing sin, not committing it, when he had a great stone rolled before him on the battlefield that he might himself make sacrifices upon it. These men were doing the best they knew; they were serving God according to the best light of their time: and the inevitable conclusion is that Israel's religion had a feeble beginning, and that the representation of the priestly writings and the later historical books, which picture it as perfect at the time of the entrance into Canaan, is the idealization of a later time.

The early historical books, especially Judges

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and Samuel, are the true point of departure for the understanding of Israel's political and social life, as well as of her religion. It is there we meet with documents most nearly contemporary; and it is perhaps the greatest difference between the older and newer methods of looking at the Old Testament that according to the older view this period was a sort of interregnum, a time of barbarism between two ages of piety; while according to the newer view these books are faithful witnesses of the early life of Israel, and the period they describe was the day of small things out of which the true Israel came to be.

II. THE ORIGIN OF DEUTERONOMY IN THE TIME OF JOSIAH [1]

If one admit this first point of Old Testament criticism, the second inevitably follows. The book of Deuteronomy prohibits all such altars as those upon which Samuel sacrificed in his native village and which Saul built upon the

[1] Cir. 621 B.C.

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battlefield, and enjoins that all places of offering outside Jerusalem shall be destroyed and defiled. "Ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire." "But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes, to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: and thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes."[1] A central sanctuary, for all Israel, and that alone legal, is the burden of the book so far as it bears upon ceremonial practices.

But how could good men like Gideon and Samuel have constructed images for the worship of Jehovah, and sacrificed on high places where they pleased, had they been familiar with any such positive prohibition of these practices as that enunciated by Deuteronomy? The mighty agony of Elijah, the zealot for the pure and undefiled religion of the fathers, was because they had broken down the altars of Jehovah and slain the prophets who ministered

[1] Deut. 12 3 ff.

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at them,[1] — the very thing which Deuteronomy commands. With Elijah's own hand the high place on Carmel was restored, and there is not the slightest evidence that he had any special direction to build again this particular sanctuary. On the contrary, the act was the initiation of a reformation in which he hoped to carry the entire nation. The argument has the greatest weight that in the time of Elijah the requirements of Deuteronomy had not been conceived.

But in 2 Kings[2] there is a careful account of a religious reformation which occurred in the reign of Josiah, 621 B.C., which was brought about by the discovery of a "Book of the Law" in the precincts of the temple. It was long ago observed[3] that the reformation which was then enacted was precisely in accord with certain portions of the book of Deuteronomy, and that only in that book are precepts to be found similar to those which Josiah enacted.

[1] 1 Kings 19 10. [2] Ch. 22.

[3] By Hobbes; cf. Cornill, "Introduction to the Canonical Books of the Old Testament," p. 50.

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The high places are destroyed, as Deuteronomy enacts, and the pillars and the asherim are burned and broken. The passover is kept, precisely according to the book, and the very temper and spirit of the reformation is that enjoined in the Deuteronomic law. Since, therefore, there is good evidence that this law was unknown in former ages, even by political and religious leaders like Samuel and Elijah, Saul and David, and since it is very clear that the law came into force at this time, and the very prominence of Jerusalem is witness that it never fully lost its force, the conclusion would seem entirely justified that Deuteronomy had its origin not long before the reformation under Josiah, the king who made it effective.

This conclusion is measurably strengthened by the Aramaic papyri recently discovered on the island of Elephantinê in the Upper Nile.[1] These documents make clear mention of a Jewish temple, with an altar to Jehovah for meal-offerings and burnt-offerings, served by devout and regularly constituted priests, in the

[1] Translated in *The Independent*, Dec. 5, 1907, p. 1385 f.

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fifth century B.C. So far from this altar and its sacrifices being in contravention to current Hebrew piety, these Egyptian Jews wrote to "Jehohanan the high priest, and his companions the priests in Jerusalem," in earnest hope that he would help them repair the altar after it had been broken down. Because of its destruction these pious men put on sackcloth and fasted and prayed to Jehovah, and their wives became as widows. In no portion of the Old Testament does there breathe a spirit of more loyal attachment to the God of Israel and sincere desire to obey His commandments perfectly, and this goes to show that the law of the central sanctuary had by no means the force in ancient Hebrew piety which the book of Deuteronomy would lead us to imagine.

This point is very important for the understanding of Hebrew history. The authors and editors of the historical books judge the kings and princes of their narratives by Deuteronomic standards of moral and religious right. This applies to the framework of the Judges, to many of the narratives in Samuel, and especially

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to the books of Kings. It is owing to the Deuteronomic point of view that we learned in our childhood of the "good kings" and the "bad kings," each ruler being positively one or the other, the standard in each case being obedience to the commandment to worship at Jerusalem only. It is only when one is aware of this point of view of the historians, and judges their work accordingly, that he is able to arrive at a clear conception of the real course of Hebrew history. Because so much of the biblical narrative has been colored by Deuteronomic conviction, the origin of the code in the time of Josiah deserves to be called the second point in modern Old Testament criticism.

III. THE FOUR SOURCES OF THE HEXATEUCH

Deuteronomy is one of a collection of six books which give the Hebrew account of the beginning of the world and of the Jewish nation, and trace the national history down to the settlement of Canaan. The third point of Old Testament criticism is that this collection

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of books was composed from four different documents, or collections of narratives, which may be separated one from the other and in part restored, though with serious omissions in the restorations, especially in the earlier documents.

Every one has noticed that the early books of the Bible are full of repetitions, and that passages of different point of view and of diverse religious quality lie side by side. It requires no expert knowledge to discern that there is great divergence between the story of Joseph, with its marvellous eloquence and its exceeding human interest, and the sacerdotal enthusiasm of the minute instructions for the construction of the tabernacle. The analysis of the Pentateuch is founded upon just such large and vital facts. It is not a question of vocabulary and syntax, although students employ observations in these fields as tests for minute divisions. The real basis of the division into documents is divergence in historical and religious point of view. Proceeding by these criteria, scholars resolve the Hexateuch into a

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document composed by a Judæan historian (J) about 850 B.C., an Ephraimitic history (E) written about a century later, the code of Deuteronomy (D) about 621, and the priestly documents (P), which were not completed until 500 B.C.

It has been the fashion with some who have accepted this theory to say that it is of no great importance whether one man or four men wrote a book, since the book remains the same. It may be urged that in a generation which for the most part cannot tell whether Elijah came before Joshua, or Isaiah before David, it is of no sensational importance whether a writing was composed 850 B.C. or 1200 B.C. It is a mistake, however, to underestimate the practical consequences of modern views concerning the Old Testament. The subject in hand is not a trifling matter of the date and name of a particular author; it affects unquestionably one's idea of the character of some of the most important books of the Bible, and therefore one's belief as to how God accomplishes His purposes in the world in which we live.

It is the modern view, not merely that four

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documents were employed in the composition of the Hexateuch, but also that the principal document, which was used as a framework and which impresses its views upon our ideas of the entire history, is the product of the priestly school of writers, and is therefore dominated by the ideas which obtained in the narrow and poverty-stricken days of Israel's faith. This document had its origin a century farther from the time to which it imputes the laws it records than we are distant from the days of Columbus. It is concerned with the lower elements of religion, laws of diet, prescriptions about clean and unclean, regulations for a just and duly constituted priesthood; and with these are mingled a somewhat superficial and mechanical notion of sin and forgiveness. The deep piety of the Psalms and the moral fervor of the prophets are on a distinctly higher level than this priestly law-book, and the relation of one to the other is not that of feeble beginning and subsequent strength, but of retrograde from a worthier life and thought.

Yet owing to its prominence in the Hexa-

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teuch, and to the zeal and skill with which it reiterates its views, it is precisely this writing which most influences the ordinary reader. The popular notions, as existent at this day, of the origin of the Jewish race, the establishment of the Hebrew religion, the beginnings of faith in God and of His worship and service, spring from this product of decadent Hebrew piety. Convictions widely prevalent and of large influence on some of the vital questions of morals and religion have the same source. The fresher and more vital narratives of the Judæan and Ephraimitic historians, from which one might set out for a sympathetic study of the development of religious thought and practice, are passed over lightly; but the concise and systematic scheme of the priestly histories lingers in the memory and forms the basis of religious judgments, some of which do not contribute to spiritual growth. The students who have disentangled the narratives have done more than work out a puzzle; they have enabled those who will learn from them to find their way through the latest and least vital stratum

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of Hebrew belief to the more vigorous and truthful convictions of earlier writers, which have lain for centuries almost unnoticed.

IV. THE GRADUAL GROWTH OF HEBREW LEGISLATION

Study of the law of ancient Israel reveals the fact that the legislation of the Old Testament was reached only through many enactments extending over a long period of time. The traditional view is that Hebrew law had no history, that the entire body of law was miraculously revealed through Moses on the summit of Sinai. This is certainly contrary to experience, since law is invariably a growth, springing out of particular cases as they arise in human affairs, and gradually systematized and brought into a code. We think our Constitution was long in the making, when we read the debates on its adoption; and yet Gladstone, mindful of the generations which have labored to produce other systems of fundamental law, spoke of the American Constitution as springing in a moment from the minds of its framers.

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There are plentiful indications in the Old Testament laws that they too were long in the making. A legislation given entire and at once would be orderly and systematic, laws on similar subjects being found together, and it would be a unity, without duplicates. But we find in the Old Testament a large number of duplicates, as, for example, the Ten Commandments both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and we have codes in different stages, showing difference in moral and religious standard.[1] Moreover, since the discovery of the Code of Hammurabi, the Babylonian king who lived about 2000 B.C., it can be proved that the laws of the Hebrews were many of them simply adopted from legislation which had been the common property of civilized peoples in the East for many centuries. Out of forty-five judgments in the Book of the Covenant,[2] thirty-five have points of contact with the laws which the French excavators dug up at Susa some five years ago. The conclusion is, not that Hebrew legislators slavishly copied

[1] Exodus 20 22–23 19, and 34 10–27.
[2] Exodus 20 22–23 19.

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Babylonian laws, but that Babylonian institutions had written themselves into the civilization of the world, and that they were taken up by the Hebrews from time to time in a free spirit.

It were a trifling matter whether a few books of law were written by one man or by twenty men, at one time or during a long period, as far as mere fact and information are concerned. But study of Hebrew legislation in its origin and growth reveals the fact that whatever is unfavorable in our impression of Jewish law, whatever breathes a spirit of narrowness and exclusiveness and of smallness in the affairs of God, comes from the later strata, when priests were the only legislators. These narrow views, these small prescriptions of acts required of God, are projected back into the Mosaic period, enunciated as if Moses were their author; and the result is that, with such notions of early Hebrew life in our minds, a true understanding of the growth and development of Hebrew law and religion is impossible. The spirit of the Hebrew legislation is misconceived when it is

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not understood as a growth. One is tempted to regard it as largely petty trifles of ritual and ceremony, whereas a careful and comparative study of its development reveals a humane and uplifting system of equal justice and moral right, with passion for the rights of the poor and persistent recognition of the higher moral obligations. Thus again the teaching of modern criticism issues in worthier ethical ideals and nobler religious principles.

V. THE WORK OF THE PROPHETS IN THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL

The fifth point is perhaps the most important, and is the truth in which all recent study of the Old Testament has its culmination. With the old dating of books and documents, and especially of the law, the religion of Israel was conceived as an utterly marvellous projection of divine truth upon the earth, without endeavor or worth on the part of its human recipients, save the humility which enabled them to accept it. The Almighty thundered, and his servants

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recorded His speech, and the religion stood forth entire and perfect. This view has made an "act of God" in current thought something strange to ordinary life, and has removed the history of the Bible from sympathetic and instructive appreciation.

According to the modern view, the law did not precede the prophets, but the prophets came before the law, and were indeed the creators of the moral convictions and religious insights embodied in the law. The legal enactments were but the registration of the spiritual convictions of determined men, whose eyes God had opened. Elijah was very zealous for the cause of his God, and very true and single-eyed in his vision, and the work of his great manhood engraved the law, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." We cannot in all cases name the particular prophet who is responsible for a moral principle or a religious precept, since the habit was to impute each advance, as it came upon the horizon, to the great founder of Israel's piety. That Moses is credited with more than he is entitled to seems

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evident from the fact that the law, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," is recorded in his name, while actually Moses employed religiously a brazen serpent, which a king instructed by a later prophet called a piece of brass and destroyed from the temple.[1] A glorious company of unremembered prophets gave their lives to the construction of Israel's piety which now stands in the name of Moses.

The more one studies the Old Testament, the clearer it becomes that the faith of Israel was wrought out in the souls of men. Hebrew faith was vitally achieved in deeds of daring courage, in the struggles of men of heroic mould. On this earth the great fundamental principles of spiritual religion were forged, and in the hearts of men of like passion with ourselves. It was the prophets who made possible the moral elevation of the law, the purity of the ancient stories, the sweet peace and majestic trustfulness of the Psalms, and the very course of the history itself. Without her prophets, Israel would have had no message

[1] 2 Kings 18 4.

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for the world. With them, she has a message which the world can never forget. They were the men who stood for right when all advantage — personal, social, political — lay the other way. They were the men who contended for righteousness still, though their nation was on the very verge of doom. They were the men who taught that God is served only in the heart, and who preserved morals and piety from dissolution in zeal for bloody offerings. The scholarship which finds its way to their side and enables one to feel the pulse of their heart-beat is no zeal for technicalities, no ambition for knowledge of an antiquarian's trifles, — it is rather the medium by which one finds his way to spiritual truth on which manhood sufficient to stand the shock of this modern day is nourished and made strong. By means of this modern knowledge one is delivered from a thousand inconsistencies and confusions which prevent clear discernment in matters of morals and faith, and the true character and real worth of religious conviction come into the clear.

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Appreciation of the criticism of the Old Testament as outlined briefly in these five points is therefore an intensely practical matter. It does not destroy the value of the ancient records, but it enables one to distinguish between them, to free his mind and spirit from unworthy views of God and His service, and to put first things first, as did the prophet, who declared in immortal words truth which Christianity does not transcend, but only enforces and makes clear: —

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"[1]

[1] Micah 6 6-8.

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CHAPTER IV

A SKETCH OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL TO THE TIME OF AMOS

SOME thirteen hundred years before the Christian era there lived in Egyptian territory, on the border of the Arabian desert, a loose collection of nomad Semites, who had driven their flocks of sheep and goats thither from out the wilderness, attracted by the better pasturage. Somewhere about 1250 B.C. this unorganized mass of herdsmen, with their families and flocks, threatened by Egyptian oppression, and stirred by religious impulse, turned their faces back to the desert from which their fathers came. Tyranny behind them, scarcity and want around them, they pressed their way northward toward the dreamland of the Bedouin, the narrow strip of rolling valley and mountain which the Great Sea fashions by her mists and showers into a canvas of perfect beauty, to hide from her sight the glare and the wastes of the hot sands beyond.

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On the southerly border of Canaan, where garden and desert contend and each achieves partial victory, they found for a time their habitation. Here in turn they were found,[1] in the waste howling wilderness, by the wilderness God, and they swore a compact with Him, and he became their God, Jahveh, God of Sinai, God of storms and God of war.[2] The covenant with the desert God pierced deep into the soul of this desert folk, and wrought ineradicably there the conviction that they belonged to the God of Sinai's storms, and that He belonged to them, for might and victory. They found Him a God of war, of the tight-gripped spear, of the wails of a doomed city, of the sword that returns not empty. Strength and dominion were even then in his sanctuary, and with the might of their God in their heart, the men of the desert, uncultured, unorganized, uncivilized, set out on their way in history. Stirred by a threat of dispossession of their holdings in the Judæan wilderness, they rallied for war with the king who threatened them.

[1] Deut. 32 10, Hos. 9 10. [2] Jud. 5 5, Deut. 33 2.

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Under the lead of their God they subdued the Amorite, whose height was like the height of cedars,[1] and planted themselves firmly in the kingdom of Sihon, from which they looked across to the alluring hills of Judæa, and caught the breath of her honey-filled forests and her vine-laden hillsides. Not as a united people,[2] — for Israel was not yet a nation — but clan by clan, tribe sometimes helping tribe, but more often singly and alone, they pressed for a foothold on the other side of the Jordan. Simeon and Levi went down in the attack and disappear from history. The tribes of Joseph were more successful, and Ephraim became a people of might.

The conquest was not the campaign of a nation, by one army and under one leader. It was the gradual immigration of tribes and clans. It was partly a peaceful settlement of unoccupied territory, and in part was accompanied by treaties with the former dwellers and oaths of brotherhood. The Canaanites remained in the cities and in the broad valleys; the new dwellers

[1] Amos 2 9. [2] Judges 1.

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sought the hillsides with their flocks, and centuries later their God was known as a God of the hills.[1] There was assimilation between the two peoples: the shepherds learned agriculture and settled ways of life; they adopted the sacred places which had been long established in the land, and affixed to them names honored in their own tradition. They waxed fat and kicked against the austere, meagre cultus of their God of storms and war: they served the gods of Canaan.

But fortunately the relations were not all friendly. In the broad valleys the Canaanites had mighty cities, and the men of the cities oppressed the newly come peasants of the heights. They spoiled their harvests; they made slaves of their sons and daughters. There was no king to whom to make appeal, no ruler to whom all could look for deliverance. A clan here, a tribe there, but the highways between the worshippers of the storm God ceased for lack of travellers, and no spear nor sword was seen among the forty thousand of Israel.[2]

[1] 1 Kings 20 23. [2] Judges 5 6, 8.

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Then was witnessed a thing we call inspiration among this herdsmen folk. A woman felt the stirring, and in a mighty eloquence of which the world has scarcely known the like, she called the mountain people from the holes and caves of the rocks, summoned a clansman to leadership, infused into all passion for victory in the name of the desert God; and her wild cry of frenzy for her people and her people's God sounds quivering and thrilling down to this day, — the Song of Deborah, the earliest monument of Hebrew literature, and one of the most intense and creative outflashes of genius that ever wrought in the making of men.[1]

Gilead abode beyond the Jordan, Dan remained in his ships, and Asher sat still at the haven of the sea.[2] There was no compulsion among the tribes, no obligation to a central power. They rallied — those who did rally — at the beacon fire of prophecy, not at the order of a government or king. The nation Israel was not yet. There was only a scattering of distantly related tribes, who believed in a com-

[1] Judges 5. [2] Vs. 17.

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mon God. Israel was only a feeling of unity in the soul of a woman, and that sense of unity was based on the one God whom all worshipped. But as the torrents of Jahveh swept them on to victory, and as for a second time the people of the desert found their God, and from their foothold in Canaan took heed to the faith that was in them, they found Him not merely the storm God of the wilderness, rising up in light from Mount Seir and glancing from Mount Paran;[1] not merely the God who helped in flight, who led a successful panic from before the gods of Egypt: He was now a God who faced an army with chariots and horsemen, and who could lead his mountaineers against a people of long cilivization; but more than that, He was a rally cry for a scattered folk, the hope of union for a people who had journeyed clan by clan, and fought for their homes tribe by tribe; in His name went forth the summons to united action; in His name the hosts assembled; by His command the Kishon swept them on to victory; and in Him the tribes of the desert were fused into a nation.

[1] Deut. 32 2.

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Beginning far back, when much of our Old Testament was written, the history of these early days was idealized, and the events were colored by the imaginations of later times far other than they were in reality. The temple services and institutions, in which five hundred years later Israel found its life and unity, when Assyria and Babylonia had taken away political independence, were written back into the far-away days, and the historical writings of the Old Testament have been revised and edited, in the form in which they now stand, on the theory that the highly developed religion, which only the prophets made possible, existed and flourished at the very beginning of Hebrew history.

As a matter of fact, however, the religion of the early days was of a very primitive type. In the time of David, Israel's God was not a world God, not a Master of all nations and peoples; far less was He the creator of heaven and earth; He was the God of Israel, and of Israel's land, brought to that land from the desert. He could not be worshipped

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outside the land He had hallowed to himself by his people's conquests. The men who forced David out of Israel's territory drove him absolutely away, in his conviction, from the presence of his God, and said to him, "Go, serve other gods." [1] The man to whom tradition imputes the noblest utterances of the universal sway of God which the world contains (Psalm 139) himself believed in a God whose dominion ended with the bounds of a petty state. His religion had place for a household idol, the teraphim, an image in human form.[2] He practiced throughout his life a species of divination by the ephod,[3] and ascertained the will of the Almighty by a priest's manipulation of a sacred lot. There came famine upon the land.[4] They inquired of God the cause, and the answer came, It is for Saul and his bloody house, and his violated covenant with the Gibeonites. They asked the men of Gibeon what should be the atonement. Blood must pay for blood, and they hanged seven of the sons of

[1] 1 Sam. 26 19 f.
[2] 1 Sam. 19 13.
[3] 1 Sam. 23 2, 6–13, 2 Sam. 21 1 ff.
[4] 2 Sam. 21 1–14.

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Saul *before the Lord* at Gibeah, among them the two sons of Rizpah the concubine. And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah spread sackcloth on the rock at Gibeah, and against vultures of the air by day and beasts of the field in the lonely night she guarded the bodies of her dead, as week after week the corpses hung on their crosses before David's God, till the merciful heaven poured out its rain. "Then was God propitiated for His land."

Such was the God of Israel, and such was Israel's religion, at the establishment of the monarchy one thousand years before the Christian era; — a provincial deity, served by teraphim and ephod, declaring his will to diviners, and rendered kindly by the vigil of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah over the bodies of her sons.

It was this primitive faith that entered upon a struggle for a foothold in Palestine with the established religion of the land, a religion inwrought into the customs and life which the new people were forced to adopt, which had its sanctuary on every high hill and under every

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green tree, which professed to control the fertility of the field and the increase of the flock. The conquerors received from the conquered their culture and civilization, even their language — for Hebrew is the language of Canaan, not the Aramæan of the desert. Israel left off the manner of nomads, dwelt in cities like the Canaanites, tilled the fields, held vintage feasts, and threatened in all things to become but Canaanites of another blood. Canaanite religion also impressed itself upon the worshippers of the God of Sinai in more than one particular. The great Jewish feasts are of Canaanite origin. The sacred places of Hebrew tradition, from Hebron and Jerusalem down, were old-time sanctuaries of Canaanite divinities. And when they built the temple of the desert God in Jerusalem, they included in the structure the houses of the sodomite, and the apartments of the women who made coverings for the Asherah, the most loathsome abominations of the Canaanitic cultus.[1]

A primitive faith of a rude, untutored people,

[1] 1 Kings 15 12, 22 46.

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devotion to a God of storm and war, a blending in life and institutions with a people of foul and ignoble worship, — how came there from this beginning the faith of righteousness, of the God of all nations and of the earth and heaven, which we know as the religion of Israel? And how came this purer faith to have such strength and penetration to the heart of Israel that it had to be thought back into the life of the early times, and those times interpreted according to its standards, so that the story of the reality of the primitive religion of Israel is left but faintly in the record, unseen by popular reading even to this day, and only spread to open view by patient research and careful reconstruction?

The faith of Israel, the religion of the God of righteousness, was the outcome of Israel's history and Israel's men, the reaction in the souls of mighty men from the happenings of a stirring and dreadful time. Without the deeds, the marching of great armies, the flaming of captured cities, the deportations of peoples, the souls of the men would never have stirred to the grip of the eternal truth; without

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the men, the history would have gone by and left a waste like Charchemish and Heshbon, voiceless to this day and still, sending forth no lesson and adding no item of knowledge of the ways of God upon the earth.

Some three centuries after Israel had brought its war God into the mountain range of Syria, and Israel and Canaan learned to go friendly together to the high altars of Baal, there appeared on the horizon a new enemy, boding fearful peril to the little people long devastated by internal strife and by combat with petty nations like itself. The new foe was the Assyrian, from his mighty empire in the two-river country to the east. He was not like the Midianite, who raided a few cattle, sacked a village or two, and disappeared with his plunder into the desert. He resembled not the Moabite, nor the children of Ammon, whose ambition was satisfied in the wresting of border towns. His home was not like that of the Philistines, a short narrow line of sea-coast. From his river capital he dominated the most extensive and wealthy territory of the world, the seat

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of its oldest civilizations; the ambition of a world empire was in his heart, and he set about world conquest, with patience equal to his cruelty, with deliberation equal to his might. The home of Israel was in the way between him and the sea. He would be master of the coast, and destroy the outposts of Egypt to the south. Relentlessly he fell upon the kingdoms of northern Syria. Hamath, Sepharvaim, Damascus, crumbled before his armies. He was the mightiest fighter known to ancient times, and the scythed chariot, mowing across a field of infantry, is his fitting symbol.

"None is weary, none stumble among them: the girdle of their loins is never loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes broken: their horses' hoofs are like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind; and they roar like young lions, and lay hold of prey, and carry it away safe, and there is none to deliver." [1]

The Assyrians were the extirpators of peoples. They carried them away captive, men, women, and children, and "planted them" — to use

[1] Is. 5 27 ff.

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their own phrase — in far-away cities, scattering and mixing people of all races and languages and religions, and utterly blotting out nations and gods. They blotted out gods, because for these peoples home and country and god were inextricably wrought together. They fought for god and native land, and if they lost their land, they lost with it their god. We may not understand this feeling, but in western Asia, in the centuries of Assyria's rise, there was no other conception of deity than that of a being attached to a particular people in its particular home, whose very existence was bound up with that nation and that land. To these tribal, localized divinities, the petty Syrian states prayed passionately for deliverance from the Assyrian. But the gods of Hamath did not save Hamath, and the men of Hamath threw them to the rubbish heap. The gods of Sepharvaim did not save Sepharvaim, and there arose thereafter none to do them honor. Now Israel went down before the Assyrian, in the Assyrian's good time, and the jackals ran in the streets of Samaria. But what saved Samaria's God from

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the rubbish heap, along with the gods of Hamath and Sepharvaim?

It was the work of the spirit of righteousness in the hearts of a few men, whose labors for their own time seemed an absolute failure, but whose mighty speech, glowing in the clear light of truth, changed utterly the character of the God whom Israel worshipped. A herdsman of Tekoa left his flocks and cast aside his pruning shears, and made his way to the altar of Israel's God at Bethel, the ancient sanctuary of Jacob. How careful was the ritual there! The feasts at the turning of the moon, and the well-appointed sacrifices! How clear rose the voice of song to heaven, and the melody of viols! Sacrifices every morning, and tithes every three days! But they sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes! they trampled upon the poor, and with exactions built houses of hewn stone! they turned justice into gall, and the cry of the oppressed into wormwood! they practised harlotry in the temple, father and son together, in the honor of their God![1]

[1] Amos 2 6, 7, 5 7, 11.

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They were princes and mighty men, but against them stood the Tekoan herdsman, alone with righteousness, and proclaimed against their altar, and cursed their solemn assemblies. It was not the raving and ranting of the professional prophet.[1] There was clear-held conviction behind the utterance of Amos. He had found God anew in righteousness. He saw the doom of Samaria and her altars as clearly as if the Assyrian's work were already done. And what then? Should Jehovah die? Should one say — where are the Gods of Samaria? *Jehovah lived* — lived in the burning feeling of right in the prophet's own soul! That was God; Israel's God! the right that enabled him to stand forth without precedent and without authority and declare the religion of the king unholy, and the altars polluted upon which men spread the garments of the poor. There was a spirit in his soul, there was a truth that came resistless to his lips; and he believed it for God, though his fathers went to an ephod for God, and sought Him in teraphim and asherah.

[1] Amos 7 14.

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To this God Amos applied all the greatness which the history of his time brought into view. The idea of a world empire, a world power, was in the heart of the Assyrian. For Israel it was something new. There had been Moab, and Ammon, and petty state after petty state. Each had its god, and the dominion of each god ceased at the national border. There was no outlook for thought, no elevation for the spirit, no fair, far lands for the imagination. The horizon's limit was a wall unto the souls of men, and within its narrow confines they lived their narrow life.

The Assyrian world idea made possible new visions. First to catch them was the herdsman prophet. The God of his people's cultus was to go into captivity with his people. If, then, the God of his fathers was dead, who was the God who spoke within him? The herdsman prophet took the world idea, and fused it with the righteousness that burned in his heart, and Jehovah, God of Israel, whom men served with sodomites in the temple at Jerusalem, whom David feared he would lose if he went

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ten miles over the border into Philistia, came forth in Amos the God of all the earth,[1] the right that is over all peoples, and whose dominion is from sea to sea.

We tell our children the greatness of Columbus, who, despite the scorn of kings and the ridicule of the wise, wrought his faith into deed and discovered a new world. We call James Watt a great benefactor, in that he invented the condensing steam-engine, and opened up the era of modern transportation. We have high praise for Franklin, who called down lightning from the clouds, and started the electrical development by which thought flashes across empires and under leagues of sea. But manhood is more than engines and wires and dynamos, and it is the story of a greater day when one describes the prophet Amos before the altar of Bethel,[2] commanding to strike the chapiter of the god of a tiny district of the earth, who had become a god of oppression and falsehood, that on the ruins of his desecrated altar, and from the wreck of an immoral nation, there

[1] Amos 5 8. [2] Amos 9 1.

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might arise the God of the poor and the God of the right, who maketh the Pleiades and Orion,[1] and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: the Lord is His name!

The name is the same as that of the deity before whom Jephthah murdered his daughter, and Rizpah watched her dead; but in the character of the deity what resemblance can you discover? The difference was wrought chiefly in the soul of Amos of Tekoa, who took heed to the righteousness that thrilled irresistible within him, and who put that righteousness on the world throne the great Assyrian enabled him to conceive. Amos did not discover the rightness of single deeds, for that knowledge is far older: but he was the first to make clear the rightness that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, the power that commands unto good, who administers the universe, unto whom men feebly reach in all idols and liturgies.

[1] Amos 5 8.

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Thus our sketch of the history of Israel's religion in its earlier and obscurer years has led us to the truth which lies at the foundation of all worthy religious belief, the doctrine of ethical monotheism. The story enables us, not merely to do justice to the herdsman prophet, and to explain how one of the world's greatest spiritual achievements was wrought, but also to grasp the essential nature of religion itself.

It was a saying of Renan that Christianity has always appeared decadent to the eyes of its contemporaries. He might have said that religion itself has seemed continually to face its dying day. Yet religion lives, and men still have place in their lives for thoughts of God. Why the ineradicableness of what Heraclitus called the noble disease? It is because of the indestructibleness of the feeling of right in the human breast, as Amos experienced it; in other words, because of the inevitableness of duty, and because given duty, God and His worship are inevitable.

Obligation is a force that holds. It comes not with self-interest; it ceases not when pleas-

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ure is on the other side. It frames commandments that will not budge, which logic cannot stir, and entreaties cannot change. Duty and conscience are the shadow of ourself, dogging our every moment while there is still an atom of manhood left within us.

In the soul life deep within, the right is the power over everything, the might beyond all mights. Duty comes without our consent, proclaims no theory of its origin, refuses often to answer why, or what for, but majestic like a king it rises to confront us, to press its claims of kingship untiring till we die. It wakeneth us morning by morning, and, crowned and sceptred, calls us to its service. The will unto good, the will that strives in our own life for good, is the strongest reality of which we have any knowledge. And when we show ourselves strong enough to disobey, and place our life against the mandate of the king of spirits, then in His seeming failure does He show himself most a king, and in the smitings of conscience, the shame of a manhood that is less than itself, there is the tribute of sorrow to a disobeyed

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monarch who is monarch still. Though I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there.

One passes without notice to the language of religion. Morals lead to religion.[1] In the right which commands us we have to do with a being who seems almighty. Duty presses home like the will of the Might over all. The right asks not permission of a superior, seeks not elsewhere consent as to what shall be its word and how it shall enforce it, takes no heed to pleas of other interests and other claimants to one's allegiance. The right is first, and abides first, the one eternal fixed reality of our spiritual manhood. And what is that but God?

In the summer of 1904 they brought up rotten cork from the waters of the East River around the bodies of greed-murdered children, and fire-hose flimsy as muslin from the ship of a thousand dead. A few months before, Chicago mourned over the holocaust of children at the burning of the Iroquois Theatre, children mur-

[1] "Die Moral führt unausbleiblich zur Religion." Kant: "Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft," p. 7 (Kirchmann). For an excellent statement in English cf. Felix Adler: "The Religion of Duty."

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dered by broken laws, fire-protections that would not work, doors that opened in. That rotten cork was wrong; it was fraud and deceit. That kind of thing has no justification; the command against it has resistless authority: that is, there is some sort of a power felt in men's souls that commands the good and condemns the wrong; and that is, there is a God in the right and behind the right, a God with whom we and all men have to do, and who has something to do with us every time we put forth our hand to the slightest deed.

The man of Tekoa declared God upon no other authority than the truth that burned in his soul. There need be no other. What are authorities and arguments beside Him who calls for righteousness as a flood of waters and justice as a mighty stream? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, of the living word unto good, of the living men in whom the struggle of the right never ceases. They find Him now whose life is earnest, though not in the petty questions which men try, nor in the labored proofs of another age, but in the living world of

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action, where right is might, the heart's one might, and where conscience declares the glory of God and righteous men show forth His handiwork.

There is ignorance both wide and deep in the present day, even on the part of the young men and women of our colleges, of the history and the literature of the sacred Scriptures. The incalculable loss in culture and character goes without saying. If there shall be revival of Biblical knowledge among educated youth, it must be that of Biblical science, equal in scholarship and scientific thoroughness with the painstaking thoroughness which now honors the natural sciences. We cannot have manhood in the laboratory and gush in the Young Men's Christian Association. Or if we do, the men will take the laboratory, to their honor, and we shall have men in the laboratory worthy of the most thorough respect for their devotion to truth, their regard for fact, but who are incompetent and helpless in some of the deeper and finer things of life.

"There is a spirit in man, and the breath of

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the Almighty giveth him understanding." That spirit is worthy of investigation: its workings in the past deserve to be traced; and if traced at all for men of the student soul, they must be traced by methods to which students are accustomed. Never did the spirit in man work more grandly, nor to better purpose, than in the old Hebrew days. Then let the young men know how a trolley car runs, if they want to, and the superiorities of a turbine wheel; let them by all means learn —

> "the glory that was Greece
> And the grandeur that was Rome";

but let them also, in the name of the manhood that is more than meat, in the name of character, honor, and worth of spirit — let them also thrill with Amos and Isaiah at the deeds of the God of the Pleiades, and let them grow quiet and reverent, and clothe themselves with dignity and worth, under the gentle instruction of that history that was lived more than any other in the secret place of the Most High, and which drew in its inspiration while under the very shadow of the Almighty.

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CHAPTER V

THE HEIGHTENING OF TRADITION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It may carelessly be imagined that zeal in writing is quite a modern disease, and that only since the printing-press, and especially since the great improvements in it and in the manufacture of paper, has there occurred anything like a Noachic deluge of literature. It is from the Old Testament, however, that the proverb comes to us: "Of making many books there is no end."[1] Receipts and contracts were as prevalent in Babylonia in the time of Moses as drafts and checks are with us to-day, and the correspondence unearthed at Tell-el-Amarna demonstrates that stylus was put to clay in Old Testament times with as little provocation as we now put pen to paper. It would be most remarkable, therefore, if the great events of Hebrew history had found but one narrator

[1] Ecc. 12 [12].

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in each period, and if all testimony to important happenings had perished, save that of one man at each crisis, Moses at the exodus, Joshua at the conquest, and so on. The reasonable expectation is that many took in hand to write the deeds that were fulfilled among them, and that, as in the case of the New Testament, they were men of different points of view.

If, in fact, there were several authors who recorded the mighty deeds of Israel's early history, and if their works have been preserved, the conclusion must be that they have been joined together and united under common titles in our present Bible. We are not at all accustomed to such literary procedure. The lives of Washington have not been pieced together, and doubtless never will be. Herodotus and Xenophon, Horace and Juvenal, Chaucer and Piers Plowman, are as separate and distinct as Longfellow and Whittier. We are not to blame, therefore, for a little natural incredulity when we are told, for example, that Exodus 14, which narrates the deliverance at the Red Sea, was at one time pieced together

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from three different documents, one written in Judaea about 850 B.C., another in Ephraim a century later, and the third not until about 500 B.C., some six hundred years after the events it describes.

But Arabic historians compose their works in precisely that fashion, adopting large sections of previous writings and treating their sources with great freedom. The instance of Tatian, whose piecework "Diatessaron" came to be the only Gospel the churches of entire districts possessed, proves that the documentary theory of the origin of large portions of the Old Testament is by no means improbable.

If it be admitted that several authors had to do with the composition of these narratives, and that their works can be disentangled, a striking difference of religious conception comes to light. The divergences are not merely in vocabulary and style, but more especially in the views that are taken of the manner of God's influence upon human life, and of that which should be first and emphatic in the relation of man to God. Particularly do the later writings

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have a tendency to make unique and dramatic the acts of God, and so to increase the religious element and to heighten the tradition.

Thus, in the story of the deliverance at the Red Sea,[1] the earliest writer records that the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night. Considering the locality, which was an arm of the Red Sea, since quite filled in with sand, and also the mention of the east wind, we may say that this narrative has in mind an unusual event, in the feeling of the writer a most providential event, wrought of God for His people, but not a non-natural occurrence. A parallel might be the freezing of the North River in an exceptionally cold winter, which would be unusual, and might be hailed by some in certain circumstances as providential, but would not imply departure from the usual order of things.

In the account next later, Moses is said to lift up his *staff* and divide the waters. No mention is made of the wind, and the act is entirely non-natural, but there is no effort to heighten

[1] Exodus 14.

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the miracle beyond the crossing of the Israelites and the discomfiture of the Egyptians.

In the narrative latest of all the wonder is performed by Moses stretching out his *hand* over the sea, and the waters are piled up like a wall on either side, the water losing its natural property until the Hebrews pass through, when again at the extension of Moses' hand the sea returns over the Egyptians. According to this writer both Pharaoh and *all* his chariots and *all* his horsemen are destroyed, while in the earlier accounts a small division of the army of that vast empire would satisfy the terms of the narrative.

The ordinary procedure in picturing to one's self what actually took place is to combine the features of all three accounts, precisely as we find them in the Bible: to think of the east wind blowing and Moses holding out his staff, and also his hand; the waters going back by force of the wind, and yet forming a perpendicular wall on both sides of a narrow passage. Popular imagination unites also the six hundred chariots of one clause with all Pharaoh's char-

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iots in the next, without realizing the difficulty of supposing that a world empire had only six hundred chariots, and that it assembled all its forces to pursue escaping slaves.

It should seem very clear, however, that we have here a case of heightening of tradition, and that it should be our privilege — indeed, that it is our duty — to make choice of the earliest and simplest narrative, and to interpret the others as the understanding of the same occurrence which prevailed in later years. One should have the right to stand by the understanding of the matter which obtained when the event was freshest in men's memories, and that without the slightest implication of an evil heart of unbelief.

Similar discretion should be exercised in the interpretation of the stories of the plagues of Egypt.[1] If one read by itself the earliest narrative, he is in the presence of natural phenomena, such as occur with more or less frequency in that land. It is not an unheard-of thing for the water of the Nile to become foul, and of a

[1] Exodus 7 ff.

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reddish tinge, so that fish die and frogs and flies swarm everywhere, and these disasters are followed, naturally, by pestilence among animals and men. It is in the latest narrative that we read that not only the Nile, but the waters of Egypt, the rivers, the canals, the pools and all their reservoirs, became blood, so that there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone. It is the same late account which testifies that Aaron smote with his staff the dust of the earth, and the dust of the earth became lice throughout all the land of Egypt; also that Aaron took handfuls of furnace soot, sprinkled it toward heaven, and it became boils, breaking forth with blisters upon both man and beast.

Of course it is possible to combine the narratives, or, rather, not to admit that there are two, and think of the Nile becoming red, and also of reservoirs and vessels filled with blood; to imagine a very severe pest upon cattle, and also that dust from the hands of a man caused boils on man and beast in all the great empire of Egypt. But it is certainly one's right to choose

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the simpler story, and interpret the history accordingly, and this only can save the credibility of the narrative for the modern man.

An instance of the heightening of Old Testament tradition, where the untrained reader can distinguish the documents for himself, is the celebrated account of the sun standing still by command of Joshua (Joshua 10 12 ff.). We read that Joshua said in the sight of Israel:—

"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon;
And thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.
And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed,
Until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies."

"Is not this written," the writer adds, "in the book of Jashar?" It was an old poetic fragment, which he took from a book far older than his time, which, of course, has long since perished. In enthusiastic transport the poet commands the sun and gives orders to the moon, and in the thrill of victory he feels that his commandments are obeyed. No more than in the case of the stars fighting against Sisera

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(Judges 5) do we need to suppose departure of the heavenly bodies from their orbits. But the less enthusiastic prose narrator of Joshua 12 does not understand the poetic exuberance of the book of Jashar, and he interprets the matter thus: —

"And the sun stayed in the midst of the heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of a man."

This writer makes a statement on the basis of the book of Jashar, and appeals to a quotation from the book as his authority; but most people to-day would understand his quotation very differently, and they certainly should have the privilege.

These three instances must serve as examples of a process which the historical books of the Old Testament witness repeatedly, that of heightening the tradition, increasing the spectacular and marvellous elements in it, in the progress of the years. The things in the Bible that bother people, which they do not like to

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have their children ask about, are mostly elements of the later biblical tradition. Writers whose very words have been preserved do not present awkward questions. When we catch the mighty spirit of Amos denouncing the injustice and oppression of his time, when we hear him call for justice because they have sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, there is no question of how much we can manage to believe; the God of the right is speaking in words we know we must believe. The world implied by the direct words of the prophets is our own world of to-day, and yet it is a world in which keen-visioned men see the hand of God ordering events for His children and commanding His servants in the way of duty. The nearer we approach to eye-witness testimony as to what happened in the history of Israel, the more closely does the record conform to laws and usages of the present world; but despite the naturalness of events the hand of God is seen in them.

The less imaginative writers, whose chapters are less colored by the marvellous and the sen-

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sational, yet who are alive to the will of God in the acts they record, are in reality the most pious. There are some men who can see no act of God in the blowing of the east wind all night; you must pile the waters perpendicularly on either side before they will admit that God has passed that way. There are those who see no action of the spirit in the foulness of a river through decaying vegetation, and in resulting plague and pestilence, even though the disaster coöperate in the freeing of a people, but they must heighten the story and make it very marvellous before they find divinity in it. The poet of the flower in the crannied wall was more truly devout than these.

The faith of the earlier writers, who told the story in its simplest form and yet told it as the record of the acts of God, is the more useful type of piety. Faith that can believe when it sees crutches in piles by a holy spring is not much needed. In the first place, there are not many cities like Lourdes: and in the second place, those who go to them, even those who are healed, do not seem to be greatly benefited

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in the manhood and womanhood which the world chiefly needs. The faith we want is the faith that will pray, and yet send for the doctor, and be very careful to follow the doctor's orders, and, when the cure is accomplished, while thanking God for His deliverance, pay the doctor's bill promptly and in full. Doubtless there were Israelites, when the Egyptians were dead upon the seashore, who said, "It was only an east wind! How lucky that it should have come up just when we wanted to cross, and died down when we were safely over!"

The most useful man is neither he who denies the wind, or forgets to mention it, and invents a marvellous story, nor, on the other hand, he who says it was only the wind and nothing more; but the man of insight on the deeper side of life, who exclaims in reverence, "The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind!"

Discrimination between earlier and later narratives is thus a matter of supreme importance for religious belief. Read without criticism, the Scriptures encourage the notion that

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God cannot do anything in this world except in an extraordinary manner, that every real act of God constitutes such a spectacle as we are never likely to see. The heightening of tradition, especially in the Old Testament, has blinded the eyes of men to the God who works by east winds and through changes in the flow of a river, and has implanted in many minds the very vicious notion that God is not in the common happenings of the world, and that the monotony of everyday life is without benefit from His presence.

That is the most terrible unbelief, in practical consequences, of which one can be guilty. How trifling is unbelief in the acts of God in the time of Moses compared with inability to discern His present commandments! How can one learn anything at all of the Man of Nazareth, who drew his every breath in the living presence of God, if his underlying thought be that God is not in our common world!

One has only to consider these practical consequences of the discovery of the heightening of Old Testament tradition to perceive that

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the newer knowledge of the Scripture is not merely a theory for scholars, but rather that it is a gift of God to all earnest and fearless men, to teach them how God really worked in olden days, that they may thus know that He is at work to-day, and be privileged to join in His work with all their strength.

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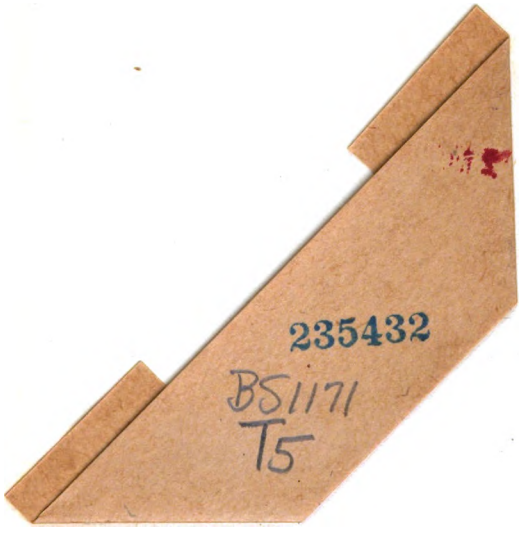

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